NEW
# NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

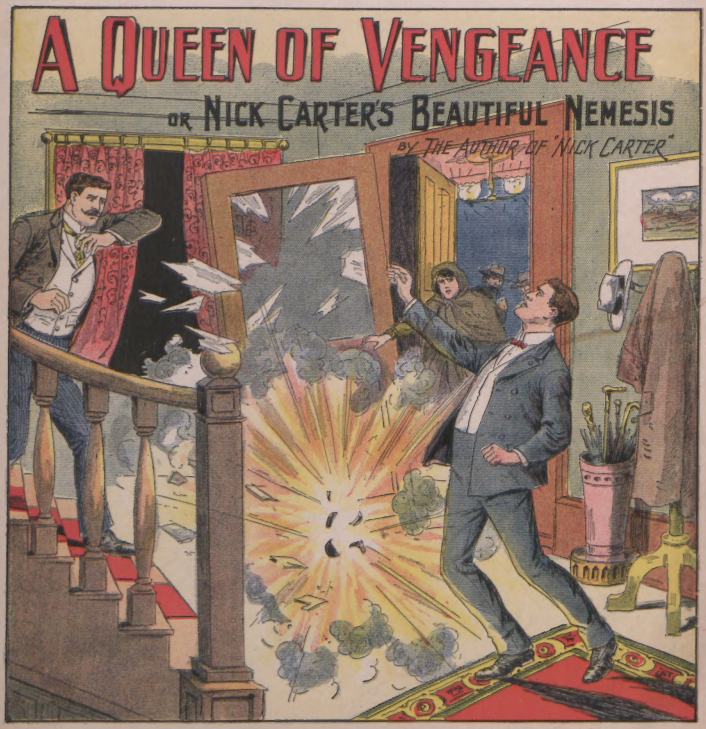
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 424. Price, Five Cents.

## A QUEEN OF VENGEANCE

### OR, NICK CARTER'S BEAUTIFUL NEMESIS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



There was a flash of sudden light, a sullen roar, the clatter of broken glass, and at the same instant Nick Carter was thrown into the midst of the debris.

**Announcement.** Readers of this weekly will find that the stories have been increased more than one-third over their former length. This increase is made in response to a general demand that the weekly be issued more frequently than once a week. To do that is impossible, but we have increased the length to show our appreciation of the favor with which these stories have been received. You will find that there is no drop in the quality with the increase. From this on, these stories will be the longest as well as the best of their kind published.

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No. 424. NEW YORK, February 11, 1905. Price Five Cents.

# A QUEEN OF VENGEANCE;

OR,

## Nick Carter's Beautiful Nemesis.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN'S THREAT.

It was half-past ten o'clock in the evening when Nick Carter's doorbell rang, and because, half an hour earlier, the detective had told his man, Peter, that he could retire for the night, he went to the door himself.

There was a snowstorm howling outside, for the month was December, and the man, who shook the snow from his shoulders and stamped it from his feet before entering the house, glanced, with keen-eyed scrutiny, from beneath his bushy brows upon the detective, and then, in a voice of hearty good will, exclaimed:

"Hello, Nick, old man! How are you?"

He was Conners, of the government secret service.

"Glad to see you," replied Nick, heartily. "Come in. Come right up to my den. We can talk better there, and I presume you have got something to say."

"Well, yes; rather."

The two men were soon seated in the detective's study, and then Conners, who was noted for his laconicisms, remarked:

"The chief sent me."

"Who, Wilkie?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"What is it all about?"

"About those conspirators; the same we had to do with in Washington."

"What about them? Haven't they been sent home?"

"They have been sent—but they didn't go. That is to say, all of them did not."

"Who did, and who did not?"

"Well, one of them did not because he could not. Marakoff. It turned out that he was a naturalized citizen, and, therefore, amenable to our laws. He'll stay

here and live on the bounty of the government for the next ten years."

"But the others——"

"Let me tell you the thing in as few words as possible, just as it is."

"That's exactly what I wish you would do."

"You know how quiet we kept that whole matter of the conspiracy, and referred it all to the secretary of state?"

"Sure."

"The secretary decided that inasmuch as no real harm had been accomplished by the conspirators because we headed them off so quickly, that the best and easiest way to dispose of them, in order to avoid the possibility of an international question arising, was to send them all home. They were told that they would be released on condition that they would depart from the country immediately—and they agreed."

"I should think they would."

"All the same, there was one among them who had no idea of obeying."

"Who was that?"

"Madame Turvanieff."

"I might have guessed it."

"Sure thing; and she's got it in for you, Nick."

"How so?"

"She swore—to me, mind you—that she would get even with you if it took her the rest of her natural life."

"She's rather a remarkable woman, that same Turvanieff."

"You bet your life she is; and an extremely dangerous woman, too."

"I've no doubt of it."

"The point of the whole thing is this, Nick: I suppose you remember that you flung her husband against the wall, there in the gambling house, and that you did it with no gentle hand?"

"Oh, yes. I remember it perfectly; and also that Madame Turvanieff tried to stab me after I did it."

"Exactly. Well, he was rather badly hurt; all smashed up, in fact, so that for a considerable time they did not think he would live."

"But he's alive, is he not?"

"Yes; and on the road to recovery; but he'll be a cripple for life."

"Indeed! I am sorry for that."

"Nick, we have discovered that Madame Turvanieff sent her maid aboard the ship with the others who were ordered home, and that the maid impersonated her—that is, she represented herself to be Madame Turvanieff, while, in reality, the madame remained here, and she is at this moment somewhere in the city of New York."

"But why did she remain behind?"

"To carry out her oath of vengeance against you."

"Bosh!"

"It's as true as gospel."

"And is that what the chief sent you to me about?"

"Just that."

"Was it his idea or yours?"

"I suppose I suggested it, but when he heard my story, he acquiesced."

"Then you think her threats are worthy of notice?"

"I certainly do?"

"Why?"

"Because of what she said to me at the time she made the threat."

"And what was that?"

"She believed, at the time she made the threat, that she would be forced to return to Russia, and she was, therefore, a little more plain spoken than she would otherwise have been."

"No doubt."

"And she worked herself into one of her passions—the same sort of condition which controlled her when she tried to knife you."

"I remember."

"She said, among other things: 'Tell Nick Carter that I understand perfectly that I owe all this to him. He has spoiled my plans. He has made my husband a cripple for life. He has taken away Turvanieff's chance of promotion. He has destroyed my own chance of advancement. He has, in a few hours, destroyed the edifice which we have consumed years in building up. He has laid waste my entire life and effort. Tell him that I will return. Tell him that I will make him suffer tenfold what he has brought upon me and mine. He can send me out of the United States now, but he cannot keep me out. He may send me to Russia now, but he cannot detain me there.'"

Conners paused a moment, and Nick shrugged his shoulders, but made no remark. Presently the secret service agent continued:

"'Tell him that I will return,' she repeated, 'and that I will wreak such a vengeance upon him as in his wildest dreams he has never imagined. I will show him what a woman can do, and for every pang he has made me suffer, I will visit a thousand upon him.'"

"Humph!" said the detective.

"Well, that's about the size of it, Nick. There was lots more like it, but that about covers the ground, except——"

"Except what?"

"That she said enough to make me believe that she does not intend to attack you directly—at least not at once."

"What then?"

"She means to make you suffer through others."

"I don't quite understand that, Conners."

"In a word, then, she knows about the Countess de Tierney and Zanoni."

"What about them?"

"She knows that they are friends of yours. She knows that they are, in a measure, under your protection; and she knows that the Countess Yvonne de Tierney is badly wanted in Russia."

"Well?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Do you mean that she will attack them?"

"I mean that such is my belief, and that it was well that you should be warned, inasmuch as we know that the Turvanieff did not leave the country."

"And you have no idea where she is, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest."

"What did Wilkie think about it?"

"Just as I do, after I had finished telling him about it."

"But he did not send you here solely for the purpose of warning me. That is not like him at all."

"No; he wants you to capture her."

"Ah! That's different."

"He knows something of the woman's record, and he knows that she is dangerous in more ways than one."

"What ways, for example?"

"She began her career by becoming a spy for the Third Section of the Russian police. In that capacity she worked her way into one of the most impossible of all the nihilists' societies—one to which many members of the Russian nobility belonged. She was taken in, and after she had learned all their secrets and had secured a complete list of the members of that particular lodge, or whatever it is called, she calmly betrayed the whole lot."

"I see; and they were sent to Siberia; is that it?"

"That, and worse. You know what becomes of beautiful women in Russia, when once they fall under the ban of suspicion for nihilistic tendencies."

"Yes, indeed."

"Whenever a beautiful woman in Russia has incurred the enmity of Madame Turvanieff, she has denounced that woman as a nihilist, and she has found a way to prove her charges, too; it was usually by secreting incriminating papers among the effects of her intended victim."

"A worse crime than murder."

"She has desolated homes without number in that way. She is as smart as they make them, as sly as a ferret, as keen as a razor, as wily as a serpent, as self-reliant as a man, as conscienceless as Cagliostro, as cruel as a wolf, and as unerring in pursuit of a victim as a bullet from a rifle."

"You give her quite a character."

"I am giving you what the chief told me to say."

"He told you all this, eh?"

"Yes; and more. She was at the head of that conspiracy to abduct the prince—not Marakoff, as we supposed."

"I suspected that all along."

"She remained here to get even with you."

"You have already told me that."

"And so the chief sent me here to engage your services to capture her, if you will undertake it."

"Of course I will."

"And I am detailed to remain here with you and to serve under your orders."

"Good! By Jove, I'm glad of that, Conners. Tell me when you first heard that Madame Turvanieff did not leave the country as she was commanded to do?"

"Yesterday morning."

"How did you find out about it?"

"By a letter that was sent to Marakoff by her. I intercepted it myself. We had been looking for something of the kind, and I managed to nail it."

"Good! What was it about?"

"Here it is; you may read it for yourself."

"Good again."

Conners passed the letter to Nick, who read as follows:

"My Dear Colonel: The bearer of this letter was in your employ at the house in K Street, and I believe I can trust him. At all events, I mean to risk it, because even if this note should fall into the hands of the authorities, it will tell them little more than that I am still in the United States, and that I mean to remain here, in spite of them all, until I have accomplished the purpose of my stay; and if they should intercept it and read it, I take this opportunity to tell all of them that I despise and defy them. They cannot find me; and even if they do find me, they cannot capture me.

"I send you this in order that you may know that I outwitted them; that I sent my maid home in my place; that I remained here, and that my sole purpose in doing so is to get even with that detective, Nick Carter, and that fellow, Conners, who assisted him."

"Hello, Conners," said Nick, aloud, "you are in this thing, too."

"Yes, a little; but go on with the letter."

The letter continued:

"Incidentally, I do not wish you to despair, for wherever they put you, I will sooner or later find a means of effecting your escape. I do not now know how nor when, but there will be a way, and I will find it after I have accomplished three tasks for which I have set myself.

"You will say that they are not easy of accomplishment, but when did I fail in anything I undertook until this fiasco of the abduction of the prince?

"And the three tasks are these: I shall do what Prince Petrovanoff failed to do, for I shall get the woman,

the Countess de Tierney, out of the country, and I will send her to the mines of Saghalien Island before I am done with her; and that other woman, now on her way home from Japan—the one called Zanoni, I mean—she shall go there, too, or your friend, Madame Turvanieff, has forgotten her cunning.

"These, then, are two of the tasks; the third—— Ah! That contemplates nothing more nor less than my vengeance upon Nick Carter.

"Just what form that will take, I will not say here, lest this letter should fall into the hands of those who are our enemies; but when I am through with him, he will be six feet under the ground—or, if not that, he will at least be dead.

"Perhaps I have expressed myself too freely, but I don't care. I mean all that I have said here, and also all that I have promised you; so do not lose heart in your imprisonment. There is an end to all things, and there will be a more or less speedy end to that.

"Your friend,

"PAULA TURVANIEFF."

Just below the signature there was a postscript which read:

"Do not suppose that I shall work alone. Since I arrived in this country, I have made many friends, among them one who hates Nick Carter as thoroughly as I do. He has engaged to find others like him, and I have no doubt that I shall be the queen of an organization which will accomplish more than the whole Third Section, under Petrovanoff, could ever have done."

The detective raised his eyes to Conners.

"The gist of the whole letter seems to be in the postscript," he said.

"Exactly."

"It was that postscript which influenced the chief to send you here after me, more than all you said to him."

"Perhaps so."

"Well, Conners, under the circumstances, I shouldn't wonder if she might give us some little trouble."

"I am glad you see it that way, for I am sure of it."

"She is not the first one who has organized a vengeance committee against me, Conners."

"I suppose not."

"And doubtless she will not be the last; but I think I can prophesy that she will go the way that others have gone before her."

"Nick," said Conners, "do you know who Madame Turvanieff really is?"

"Nothing more than you have already told me."

"She is Prince Petrovanoff's sister. She knows that you sent her brother to Japan as a prisoner of war, and she has that against you, also; and she is twice as smart and ten times as merciless and cruel as he ever was."

"She is also a very beautiful woman, Conners."

"Maybe I don't know that. Sure, I'm Irish, and an Irishman always has an eye for beauty wherever he sees it."

What Nick Carter might have said in reply to that remark is not recorded, for at that moment the doorbell rang a second time, and the detective rose from his chair to answer it.

As he was on the point of leaving the room, Conners put out a hand and detained him.

"It is eleven o'clock at night," he said, tentatively.

"Well, I know that," replied Nick.

"Are you expecting anybody?"

"No; no more than I was when you came."

"I've got a hunch, Nick."

"What about?"

"About that ring at the door. I shouldn't wonder if I was followed here."

"Suppose you were; what of it?"

"Maybe they're calling you to the door to shoot you, that's all."

"Who? The madame?"

"Sure."

"Hardly that."

"Let me go down in your place. Let me answer the ring."

"Not in a thousand years, Conners."

"Well, when you open the door, step back out of the way, for I feel it in my bones that there is danger down there."

"I am always on my guard, Conners. I was when I opened the door to you. So many crooks, murderers and thieves have sworn away my life, sooner or later, that I keep my weather eye open."

"All right. Go ahead. I'll wait here."

"Do so."

Nick descended the stairs, and while he did so, the bell rang a second time—a loud, impatient peal, as if the person outside were in a hurry to enter.

The outside door—the one which opened into the vestibule, had not yet been closed for the night, and as there was a brilliant light out there while the one inside the hall was quite dim, Nick, as he approached the door, could see the outlines of a figure standing there, evidently waiting to be admitted.

He stepped quickly and silently to the door, and then, without opening it, stood to one side while he listened and waited for the bell to be rung a third time.

The ground glass in the hall door did not permit him to see more than that there was a person waiting outside; he could not discern whether it was a man or a woman; and whoever it was, that person stood quite still, with scarcely a perceptible motion.

After an interval, which might have occupied two or three minutes, the bell rang a third time, and then Nick

smiled broadly, for the figure in the vestibule had not moved.

The button which communicated with the bell was, of course, outside the house, so that the individual in the vestibule could not have pressed it this time, and the detective, therefore, knew that there were at least two persons on his doorstep; one inside the vestibule, and another, perhaps two or three more, outside, waiting for the door to be opened.

"All right," he said to himself. "I'll open, anyhow, and see what comes of it."

He stepped forward then, seized the doorknob, and with a quick motion turned it and threw the door ajar; but, as he did so, he stepped back again suddenly into the corner, out of the way of possible danger.

It was well that he did so, for upon the instant that the door swung open, there was a flash of sudden light which filled the hall from end to end. It was followed by a sullen roar, and the clatter of broken glass.

At the same instant Nick Carter was thrown into the midst of the débris, full upon his face.

The Russians had resorted to their favorite expedient —the bomb.

## CHAPTER II.

### A MESSAGE OF FOUR WORDS.

The instant when the explosion sounded through the house, Conners leaped to his feet and bounded through the open doorway into the hall.

The hallway was filled with dust and the suffocating odor of the explosive, but Conners did not hesitate.

A second leap took him to the stairway and a third carried him all the way down to the ground floor, where he alighted just as Nick Carter was in the act of rising to his feet.

"All right, Nick?" asked Conners.

"Never touched me," replied Nick. "It was the concussion which knocked me over."

But Conners did not hear the last part of the detective's reply, for he was already out of the house in pursuit of the person who had thrown the bomb.

He might, however, have saved himself the trouble, for all that he could discover was a hack, drawn by horses on a dead run, just as it was in the act of rounding the adjacent corner.

Conners realized instantly that there was no use in pursuing it. The vehicle had too great a start, and it was already so far distant that there was no hope that it would be in sight when he could reach the corner, had he decided to pursue it.

He returned to the house at once, and found Nick still standing in the hallway where he had got upon his feet after the explosion.

"Catch 'em?" asked the detective.

"Can't say I did," grinned Conners. "Say, Nick, are you hurt anywhere?"

"Never touched me, I tell you."

"May I laugh?"

"Sure. Go ahead, if it will relieve you."

"It will, mightily. You're a picture. I've been told before now that I have the map of Ireland on my own face, but, sure, you've got the map of Hades on yours at this minute. I wish you'd sit for your photograph. I'd like to preserve a memento of this occasion. What did you do? Dodge it?"

"I suppose so."

"Why didn't you catch it, same as you did the one in Washington?"

"Look at the tiling on that floor," said Nick, without replying to the question. "I expected a gun; I did not look for a bomb."

"That is the favorite weapon for a Russian."

"Oh, I know that, all right enough; but, all the same, I was not looking for it then."

"You're not hurt at all?"

"Not a scratch. Just jarred a little, that's all."

"Well, wouldn't that jar almost anybody?"

"I think it might."

"Will you believe now that Madame Turvanieff is dangerous?"

"I have always believed her dangerous, Conners, but she is even more so than I anticipated. Come upstairs while I fix myself, and I'll talk while I'm busy, for I am going out."

"Where?"

"To Forty-fourth Street."

"What for?"

"That is where the Countess de Tierney lives."

"Do you suppose they have gone there?"

"I think they went there before they came here."

"Why so?"

"Do you remember the letter?"

"Sure."

"Well, that letter put me last on the list, if you will remember."

"Yes."

"And it placed Yvonne de Tierney first."

"Sure."

"And Zanoni second; but Zanoni is not here. She has not returned from Japan yet, although I expect her here the day after to-morrow. But the point is, that the letter placed me last and Yvonne first."

"Well, what do you make of that?"

"Simply that our friends who threw the bomb went there, to her house, before they came here."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am almost sure of it. Anyhow, I am going there at once."

"I will go with you."

"No; I want you to remain here where you are."

"What can I do here?"

"Just wait for me to return, that's all. I shouldn't wonder, Conners, if they would be nosing around here again before the night is over, just to see what damage they did, and to find out if they had killed me."

"All right. I'll stay. But I suppose I can keep watch in my own way, eh?"

"Sure. Just as you please."

"Then, if it is all the same to you, I'll keep watch from the outside. I'd like to catch one of that outfit sneaking around this neighborhood to find out what damage has been done. It would do me a pile of good."

"I sincerely hope you may do so."

Nick Carter was soon prepared for the street, and he adopted a disguise which would readily have passed him anywhere as a night beggar of the streets of New York—one of those individuals who infest the metropolitan thoroughfares at night, who ask for a dime with which to purchase a drink, but who would not hesitate to rap you on the head with a piece of cable, or a length of lead pipe, and help themselves, if the opportunity should offer.

"You don't expect to be admitted to the house where Madame de Tierney lives, in that rig, do you?" asked Conners.

"No; and it is not necessary that I should be."

"How are you going to find out, then, if anything has happened to her?"

"Quite easily. I shall send Patsy ahead of me to find out."

Patsy—Nick's youngest assistant—had, in the meantime, descended the stairs from his own room to find out what the explosion meant, but he had made no remark, and had asked no questions. His long training under the detective had taught him that Nick Carter would explain when the proper time came.

Now, however, he stepped forward.

"Shall I go at once?" he asked.

"Yes; and meet me in the corner saloon, where we have met before."

He was out of the house and gone in a jiffy, and five minutes later Nick also departed.

They had no sooner gone than Conners helped himself to some of the detective's paraphernalia, and having, as he believed, thoroughly disguised himself, he also left the house, walked up the street to the adjacent corner, and then returned and took his station where he could keep an eye on the detective's residence without himself being seen.

Nick Carter went directly to the saloon, where he had agreed to meet Patsy, and presently, after a wait of, perhaps, a quarter of an hour, the young assistant arrived.

"Madame de Tierney is not there," he said, as soon as he entered.

"Where is she?"

"They do not know. She went out early in the day, and has not returned."

"Who did you see?"

"Mrs. Grosvenor herself."

"Tell me what she said."

"Just what I have already told you, except that about five o'clock this afternoon she received a note from the countess in which she said she would not be home to dinner, and might not come home to-night at all."

"I would like to see that note."

"I thought you would, and I asked Mrs. Grosvenor for it."

The note stated exactly what Patsy had said, and if it was not in the handwriting of Yvonne, the imitation was so perfect that it defied detection.

"It is her handwriting," said Nick, examining it intently. Then suddenly he uttered an exclamation and stepped closer to the light.

"Come here, Patsy, and I'll show you something," he said, presently. "Look there."

He pointed with his finger to marks upon the paper which might have been made with any blunt instrument, but which in this case had evidently been produced by the pressure of a finger ring.

They were scrawled across the paper, over the writing, but a glance told the detective that they had not been placed there for nothing, and that it was evident they had been intended to convey some sort of message.

He tried the light upon them from every sort of direction, but without being able to read what had been written there after the body of the note was inscribed—or was it before?

At last he held the paper up to the light, so that the glare shone through it, and then, after a moment, it was all plain.

There were four words written on that sheet of paper by the mere pressure of a ring upon it; and those four words, written one under another, were:

"Prisoner." "Turvanieff." "Blavatski's." "Midnight."

It required considerable time to decipher them, but the detective succeeded in accomplishing it at last, and he placed the paper carefully in his pocket.

"Come, Patsy," he said, then, "we will talk while we walk. I want to find a telephone booth, and the nearest one is over on Broadway. You will have to go in and do the talking for me, for in this rig I would not be allowed inside the hotel."

"What am I to do?"

"Call up police headquarters; tell them the information is for me; ask if there is a saloon anywhere in New York kept by a man named Blavatski, and then hurry back to me as quickly as possible, for it is almost midnight now. You see, Patsy, she was ordered to write that note, and she obeyed, but she managed, somehow, to take her ring from her hand and, with it, to trace on the paper those four words, before she wrote the message. It was then inspected, folded and sent, with never a suspicion on the part of her captors that there were two messages there. Those four words mean that she has been captured by Madame Turvanieff, and that something is going to happen at a place called Blavatski's at midnight. Probably Yvonne heard them make arrangements to meet there, and has told me about it as well as she could, under the circumstances. Here we are. Hurry, now, for if there is such a place, I must lose no time in getting there."

## CHAPTER III.

### A NEST OF ANARCHY.

"Well?" said the detective, impatiently, as soon as Patsy issued from the door of the hotel.

"There is such a place. I talked with the inspector himself. He is still at the office."

"Where is it—the saloon?"

"In Goerck Street, not far from Grand. It is kept by a Pole, he says, and is as tough a place as there is in New York."

"Is it an all-night place?"

"Yes; side door; Raines law hotel."

"All right, Patsy. You skip home, now. I'm going on this trip alone."

Nick turned without another word and hailed a cab, which was passing. When it drew up beside him and the driver looked at him askance, he said:

"I look broke, but I'm not. If you will drive me to the corner of Grand and Goerck Streets in thirty minutes, I'll give you double fare."

"I can do that, all right, but let's see the color of your money, mister."

Nick produced a five-dollar bill.

"If you do it in twenty-five minutes, you can have that," he said.

"Jump in, boss. I reckon you're all right."

The detective complied, and in a moment he was dashing through the street at a rate of speed which would have been objected to at any other hour of the twenty-four; and exactly twenty-five minutes from the time of starting, the cab drew up at the indicated corner.

"Here's your five-spot," said Nick, as he sprang out on the curb; and then he laughed aloud, for the driver was staring at him in open-mouthed amazement.

"Don't you know me?" asked Nick.

"Well, I wouldn't have known you, that's sure, only for your voice. That is the same. Say, you grow whiskers and hair quicker than anybody I ever saw."

"It's a way I've got," replied Nick.

The fact was, that while he was inside the cab, realizing that he was probably going into a nest of Russians, or Poles, who, in all probability were nihilists and anarchists, he had adopted a wig and beard, which were carried in his pockets for emergencies, and had so transformed himself in that short time, that he thoroughly looked the part he intended to represent.

"Shall I wait for you?" asked cabby.

"Yes; if you have nothing better to do; but not here."

"Where, then?"

"Around the corner of the next street. If I want you to drive toward me, I will utter a low whistle—so;" and he whistled in a low tone the note he had selected for the signal.

"If you hear that whistle, drive toward it without delay," he added. "I may be an hour, or two, or three, or four; but if you wait for me, I'll return—and I may want you badly."

"All, right, boss, I'm on."

It lacked about five minutes of midnight when the detective entered the saloon, which he discovered to be a place unique among its class.

There was a short bar at the far end of the place, and the remainder of the long, narrow room was filled with tables and chairs, which of themselves were now comfortably filled with customers.

There were probably fifty or sixty persons of both sexes gathered there, and at a glance the detective saw that they were one and all foreigners.

"A perfect nest of anarchy," he muttered, as he threaded his way among the tables toward the bar, feigning not to see the curious glances that were bestowed upon him as he went.

"They know that I'm a stranger, all right," he thought, as he stepped up to the bar and called for beer.

It was thrown at him rather than served to him, and then, while he was pretending to sip at it, the bartender, idle for the moment, remarked:

"Stranger here, aren't you?"

He asked the question in English, but Nick replied in Russian, and scowled darkly as he did so.

"Talk something to me that I can understand, and not

that heathenish lingo," he growled. "What was it you asked me?"

"I asked you if you were not a stranger here?"

"Yes; here, and everywhere else, for that matter."

"Have you no home?"

"I had one once, and a wife and children. Bah! Don't talk to me."

"Where are you from now?"

"Now! From anywhere, and nowhere. I do not know. I have been dead seven years, and have just returned to life."

"You mean that you have been to Siberia?"

"Yes. In the mines. Seven years. Is that not enough?"

"I should say so. And you escaped?"

"I am here. That is enough."

"How did you find this place?"

"Look here, my man, why all these questions? I am here. It is sufficient."

"I ask them because I wish to know my customers."

"Are you Blavatski?"

"Yes."

"I am Rogenvenski."

"Who sent you here?"

"Nobody. I found the place."

"How?"

"By walking past it and reading the sign."

"Do you know anybody who comes here?"

"I know nobody. I tell you I have been dead for seven years. Is it not enough?"

"How long have you been in this country?"

"Since morning."

"And how did you get here?"

"On a sailing vessel, where I worked as a sailor. I floated out to sea on a raft, from Saghalien. I was picked up. The vessel was bound for this port. I came with it. That is all. Is it not enough?"

"Perhaps."

"If you do not like the company of a countryman, I will go. I have money to spend, but I can dispose of it elsewhere."

"Stay, stay! Don't be so hasty."

"But you give me no welcome."

"We have to be very careful here."

"Why?"

"There are reasons. Are you a nihilist?"

"I am nothing, I tell you."

"And you love the czar?"

"Ah, yes. So well that I would like to hug him in these arms—so! Let me show you."

Nick stepped upon the rail in front of the bar, and, reaching out, seized the proprietor in his arms before the man was aware of his intention. Then he lifted him from his feet, and drew him across the bar to the floor beside him, all the time adding steadily to the pressure of his arms, until Blavatski was well-nigh crushed.

He tried to call out, but the sound which came from him was merely an inarticulate gurgle, until Nick released him.

Then he fell to the floor and called lustily for help.

In the meantime others in the room had witnessed the scene at the bar, and now many of them leaped to their feet and rushed forward, but only to find that the detective was assisting his victim to his feet, and apologizing and laughing as he did so.

And strange to say, the proprietor was appeased—perhaps because Nick had stated that he had money to spend.

At all events, he motioned his countrymen back again toward their seats.

"It was only in play," he explained.

"Yes," said Nick. "Blavatski asked me how well I love the czar, and I showed him how I would like to hug him if I had the chance."

"B-r-r-r!" said Blavatski, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Come, you who are upon your feet," said Nick. "I have been dead seven years. I am only just alive to-day. I have money. I will ask you to drink to all those who are dead over there in the mines, where I came from. Is it not enough?"

There was no dissenting voice in that crowd. They all came forward in reply to the invitation, and after a moment more Nick felt that he had done well in assuming the rôle he was playing.

But he looked in vain for signs of Madame Turvanieff, although it was now considerably after the hour of midnight.

He had no doubt, however, that he had read the message of Yvonne correctly, and likewise he felt assured in his own mind that one or more of her followers were there, or were to meet there.

But he did not know them. He had no means of recognizing them, unless he should by providential chance overhear some remark which would put him on the track—or, better still, if she herself should come to Blavatski's.

It was not likely that she would do that, however. It was no place for a woman like her; and yet, who could tell what rôle she was playing now, since she had elected to remain in America, and to devote her life and her energies to vengeance against Nick Carter?

In the meantime, while these thoughts were coursing through his brain, his new-found associates were thronging around him, eager to learn the particulars of his incarceration on the terrible island of Saghalien, which is the hell-hole of all Siberia.

And he was on the point of accommodating them; he

had decided to invent a thrilling tale of his experiences there, and to do what he could to rouse all the irate passions within them, when he saw the front door open and close, and Madame Turvanieff, followed by three men, entered the room, and passed directly to a table in one corner of the saloon, which seemed to have been reserved for them.

But most remarkable of all was the fact that the instant she entered the place, a hush fell upon the throng, and every eye was turned toward her.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SEVEN YEARS DEAD.

The detective was aware that his disguise was perfect, and, moreover, that Madame Turvanieff could not possibly have any idea that he was at all aware of her movements. Therefore it was not at all likely that she would even suspect that he might be at Blavatski's.

However, the fact remained that he was a stranger, and would therefore be looked upon with more or less suspicion.

Blavatski was standing beside him when the quartet entered the saloon, and he turned to the proprietor at once.

"That is a beautiful woman," he said, in Russian.

"She is an angel from heaven," replied Blavatski, solemnly.

"Indeed!" said Nick, with a shrug. "Surely this is a strange place for the visitation of angels."

Blavatski smiled.

"There are many kinds of angels," he said. "There are angels of mercy and angels of vengeance."

"And which is this beautiful woman?" asked Nick.

"Just now she is an angel of vengeance."

"Ah! For the wrongs our people have to suffer? For the wrongs I have suffered? For the wrongs which thousands are now suffering among the mines and amid the snows of Siberia?"

"Yes."

"Who is she, Blavatski?"

"We do not call her by name. To us she is merely the 'Queen.'"

"The queen of what?"

"Of ourselves. Call her the Queen of Vengeance, if you will."

"But vengeance upon whom? Against whom?"

"My friend, you wish to know too much in too short a time. I am disposed to like you, and therefore to trust you, but the latter cannot be done until you have been among us a much longer time than you have."

"As you please," said Nick, with a shrug, and he turned away. But he almost immediately turned back again, and added:

"Present me to the queen, Blavatski. Perhaps she may prove to be a better reader of character than you are."

"I will ask her permission."

"Do so. I will wait here."

"What shall I say to her about you?"

"What I have already told you. That I am Ivan Rogenvenski—that I have been dead seven years, and have only just come to life. Eh? Is it not enough?"

"And if she asks for further information than that?"

"Tell her to ask me in person, or to communicate with the chief of the Third Section in the city of St. Petersburg. He can give her my record, only that he would be badly frightened if he learned that I had escaped from Saghalien with my life. Ah, bah! Blavatski! When a man is seven years dead, as I have been, his friends forget him, and he loses track of all he ever knew."

"I understand."

"No, you do not. You could not unless you had been seven years dead yourself."

"God forbid!"

"Ay, God forbid. It is well said. Tell her that I was born yesterday, and that I attained maturity in twenty-four hours. She will understand."

"And if she does not?"

"Then she is no queen for you, and I will tell her so."

"Beware, Rogenvenski! She is all-powerful. She has many friends here. The room is filled with them."

"I beware? Blavatski, you do not yet know me. I have no friends save these"—and Nick stretched out his arms as if about to embrace Blavatski a second time, whereat the landlord stepped hastily back out of his reach.

"I have no friends but these," repeated Nick; "but they are reliable. Working in the mines strengthens the muscles. I am as strong as four or five men. How much do you weigh, Blavatski?"

"More than two hundred pounds, as they count weight in this country."

"Then see!"

Nick stepped forward and seized him, whereat Blavatski struggled.

"Ah, bah!" said Nick. "Be quiet. I will not hurt you. Stand stiff. Keep your joints firmly locked together. I will not hurt you, I tell you. Can you not trust me?"

"Surely."

"Then do as I tell you. So! That is right. Now do not be frightened."

With a quick motion, the detective seized the landlord with his hands on either side of his body, and tossed him into the air, straight upward toward the ceiling.

Then, as the landlord sailed upward, Nick caught him by the feet and held him there for a moment.

Then he placed the open palm of his right hand under the soles of Blavatski's feet, and, again cautioning the man to keep his muscles and joints rigid, he slowly extended his arm until he was holding more than two hundred pounds at arm's length with only one hand.

Every eye in the room was turned toward them as he accomplished this wonderful feat of strength and skill, and the instant the people there comprehended what it all meant, there was a round of applause throughout the saloon.

There were cries of "Bravo!" too, from every quarter, and Nick noticed with especial delight that Madame Turvanieff seemed to be especially interested in the event.

That was all he had desired to accomplish—to interest her—and he let the landlord down gently to the floor, at the same time turning his back to the people in the place.

"Now, Blavatski," he said, "we will have another drink. I have still much money to spend."

"But where did you get your money? You did not tell me that; and a man lately from the mines of Saghalien——"

"Bah! Did I not tell you that I came here on a sailing ship? I am a sailor and a navigator. Perhaps I was once in the Russian navy—who knows? On the way here, if the ship on which I found myself happened to encounter a storm, and if all the officers who could navigate the vessel were washed overboard, would it not be my clear duty to save the vessel, and to bring her into port?"

"Surely it would be so."

"And do you not think that the owners of such a vessel, when they discovered what a poor castaway had done, would recognize him for his services?"

"Ah! Now I understand."

"A, as well as I, perhaps better," said Nick, smiling vaguely.

They turned their backs to the bar again, and the detective was pleased to notice that Madame Turvanieff was beckoning to Blavatski.

"Ah!" he said. "She wants you; and, if I am not mistaken, she wants to know me."

He watched Blavatski cross the floor to Madame Turvanieff, and he saw that they were conversing together in an animated manner, while with every gesture the eyes of the woman were turned inquiringly toward himself.

"I have entered the wedge," he mused. "Now let us see what comes of it."

After a few moments Blavatski returned.

"The queen is interested in you," he said.

"I am honored," replied Nick, smiling.

"She will talk to you. Come!"

"Wait!" said Nick. "Do you know her real name?"

"No; nobody knows that. She prefers to be known here only as the queen."

"And how long has she been among you?"

"Scarcely more than a week. But she is expecting us. Come!"

"Wait. How do you know that you can trust her?"

"Through our friends who brought her here, and they are reliable. She has been high in the circles in Russia; she is high among them now."

"But as a matter of fact, you know her scarcely better than you do me, eh?"

"Yes; that is true."

"Ah!" said Nick.

Recollection of what Conners had told him about this woman rushed across him at that moment. He remembered what had been said about her joining the nihilists in St. Petersburg, and afterward betraying them to the authorities. He remembered how she was hated by the nihilists in her own country, and that in reality she was a spy of the police, and he understood that now she was merely making use of her knowledge of the secrets of nihilism for the purpose of furthering her own private ends.

He was smiling as he crossed the room toward her, for he understood now how he could, by the mere mention of her name, turn all these people against her in an instant, for he knew that nihilists never forget and never forgive.

He knew that, having once betrayed them, her name had been sent broadcast throughout the world wherever there were nihilistic circles, and that it was known to every nihilist on earth as the name of a traitor and a spy.

"Surely," he thought, "the game is in my own hands now, when I choose to play the winning card."

And then he found himself before her, and that she was smiling up at him in her most bewitching manner—and she could be most bewitching when she chose.

"Plainly," thought Nick, "my game is to pretend to fall a victim to her wiles—and also to her smiles, as well. She looks the queen, all right, with those big eyes, that wealth of hair, her bewitching smile and her covert glances through half-closed lids."

She spoke to him in Russian, as soon as he was presented, and then almost immediately changed into French, and to both her questions, in each language, Nick answered readily.

"You are not what you seem," she said, then.

"No," replied Nick. "Few of us are. I have been dead seven years, madame. I have only just returned to life."

"To life—and hope?" she asked.

"Ah, to life, to hope—and to vengeance!"

"Good!" she exclaimed. "Be seated, please, for I am sure we will be friends."

## CHAPTER V.

### A SIREN MEETS HER MATCH.

"Who are you?" she asked, as soon as he was seated beside her.

"I call myself Rogenvenski, for want of a better title," he replied.

"But that is not your true name?"

"Surely not, madame."

"And you will not tell me what that is?"

"I have forgotten it; I have been dead seven years."

"You are an educated man."

"I was, when I was alive before."

"And an officer in the Russian navy."

"I might have been so. I have forgotten."

"You find it convenient to forget?"

"I find it pleasant to forget some things—also pleasant to remember others."

"I understand."

"Thank you."

"That costume ill becomes you, Rogenvenski."

"It is the best I have at present, but I have money to procure another, if another is necessary."

"You were once a noble, were you not?"

"Whatever I was, I am now Rogenvenski—at your service, if you can dispose of me in any way, madame."

"You are a very strong man."

"Working in the mines makes a man strong—or kills him."

"You lifted Blavatski as if he were a feather."

"I could lift three like him in the same way."

"Blavatski has told me that you arrived in America only this morning."

Nick made no reply, and she continued:

"Do you speak English?"

"Yes."

"Blavatski said you did not."

"I gave him that impression, although I did not say so in words."

"Ah! Do you speak it well?"

"As well as Russian, and French, and Italian, and Spanish, and many other languages—that is, almost as well."

"And you have nothing to do?"

"At present, nothing."

"Would you care to serve me?"

"To the service would be in keeping with the accomplishment of my own desires—yes."

"It might lead to the accomplishment of them, indirectly, even though it were not now directly in line with them," she said.

"Tell me what the service is, and I will answer."

"Have you ever heard of a certain Madame Turvanieff?" she asked.

"Madame Turvanieff?" repeated Nick, to gain time, for he was amazed that she should ask such a question.

"I see you have not. How could you, hidden away in the mines as you were? Shall I tell you about her?"

"If it pleases you."

"She is a spy of the police; a traitor to the nihilist, for she betrayed them to the police in St. Petersburg—and, in short, her life is forfeit to the cause."

"Well?" said Nick. "I have no interest in that."

"She is here in America."

"Indeed!"

"She is at the present moment my prisoner, and I have been commanded to return her to Russia for punishment there, but chiefly because she has in her possession valuable secrets which our circles desire to compel her to disclose."

"And what of all that? It does not interest me, madame. I am not a nihilist, although I would not hesitate to become one if it would further my ends to do so. But what of all that, and how can I serve you?"

"There are others here who are also implicated with her."

"Ah! I begin to understand."

"It is necessary to capture those others also."

"Yes? Well?"

"One of them is a man—an American; a man not larger than yourself in stature, but a veritable giant of strength."

"Stronger than I?"

"No-o-o. I think not; but it was your exhibition of strength which attracted me."

"Then it is fortunate that I demonstrated it. To be attracted—ah! I am forgetting. I should remember that I look like a peasant, and I should talk like a boor, instead of like a courtier. But it is your eyes, madame. They make me forget."

She was smiling brightly upon him now.

His delicately implied compliment accomplished more for him than anything else could have done.

"Who is this man to whom you refer?" he asked.

"An American, as I have said. A detective. By name"—and she changed her tongue easily into English as she uttered the last sentence—"Nick Carter."

Nick looked pleasantly interested, but made no comment.

"I see you do not know of him," she said.

"I have been dead seven years, madame."

"Yes, I forgot. We will let that pass. The service I wish you to render me is to assist me in capturing this man. I have instructions to capture or to kill him, as occasion may."

"I have no enmity against this man. I cannot consent to assist in his murder. I have not yet progressed so far."

"But you can assist me in capturing him."

"Yes; if you convince me that it should be done."

"He is working for the czar; he is an accomplice of the woman I told you about, who is already my prisoner—this Madame Turvanieff. Listen: I am less particular than you are about the subject of killing, and this very night I sought to kill Nick Carter at his own home, by casting a bomb through the doorway, when he opened it in reply to a ring at the bell."

"Did you throw the bomb yourself, madame?"

"Why not?"

"Then if you did that, there is something more than a mere order from your superiors to capture or to kill this man. You hate him on your own account."

"Hate him! I hate him with all the fury of my soul!"

"And why?"

"He has been inimical to me from the first. He ruined all my prospects for the future. He ruined the prospects of my husband. He has made my husband a cripple for life. Surely that is sufficient; no?"

"I understand now. But you could not expect me to kill him for that, madame? I could do such a thing only——"

"Well? Only? Continue, sir."

"Only for a woman I loved and who loved me."

She dropped her lids over her eyes and blushed becomingly.

For a moment she was silent; but then she raised her eyes again to his, and he saw that they were shining brightly, as if with sudden resolution.

Again she changed the language, and this time it was Spanish, for she remembered he had said that he spoke it as well as others.

"Go!" she said, in soft Castilian. "Rid yourself of that impossible beard; purchase for yourself the attire of a gentleman, for you are one; then return to me, here, and——"

He waited a long time, but she did not continue. Presently he said:

"And what, madame?"

"And perhaps then I can convince you that you will wish to kill Nick Carter for me."

Nick leaped to his feet with a bound, as if he were moved beyond his control by what she had said, the meaning of which could afford but one solution.

But she detained him with a gesture, and he sank back again into the chair he had occupied. He was playing his own part quite as well as she played hers, and he had no compunctions whatever in deceiving such a woman.

"Wait!" she said, still in Spanish. "Do not be overhasty. It is late. You can find neither a barber nor a clothier to-night."

"Ah! But I can wake a barber, and choke him till he consents to shave me; and I can, with my shoulders, force the doors of a clothier's, and help myself to his wares."

"And get yourself into prison for your trouble—into prison, where you would be no good to me at all," she said, well pleased with his perfectly simulated vehemence. "See! You have already attracted the attention of the others in the room."

"And what if I have, madame? I have no fear of them, or of all of them. I could throw them bodily, one at another, until I strewed the floor with them. And as for the prison, why, I could tear their iron bars apart and step out to liberty as easily as I dismember this chair," and he seized a chair next to him, and with one wrench of his hands, pulled it into a broken and unrecognizable mass.

Blavatski came rushing forward.

"My chair!" he exclaimed.

"I will pay for it," said Nick, and he produced the money from his pockets.

"But why did you break it?"

"To prove to your queen that I could do so."

"You are wonderful!" said the madame, now thoroughly won over—more thoroughly, indeed, than she herself at that moment believed.

"Wonderful?" said Nick. "Ah, no, madame; it is you who are wonderful. Your eyes, your hair, your smile; they are all dazzling. And you yourself—all of you—the combination—ah! I cannot express myself! You are beautiful! A queen indeed! A man might kill an army of other men at your bidding. Stay where you are. I will return."

Then he left his chair again, and started for the door.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NICK CARTER'S WONDERFUL STRENGTH.

The detective, however, had not taken half a dozen steps before he became aware that the people who were foregathered in that place did not intend to permit him to depart as he had come.

As he started for the door, a dozen or more of them rose, as if by preconcerted agreement, and formed themselves in line across the floor in front of him, thus forcing him to come to a stop.

And he did so with a smile on his face, for he had no fear of his ability to get out of the saloon if it pleased him to do so.

"Why do you stop me?" he asked, in Russian.

One of the men—a fellow who was almost a giant in stature—took a step forward, and acted as spokesman for the others.

"Because we are not satisfied regarding your identity," he replied.

"What more do you desire to know about it?" asked Nick.

"We wish to be assured that you are not a spy."

"And how can you assure yourselves of that, pray?"

"By asking you to remain here until the place closes for the night—or at least until we have all departed for our homes."

"And if I refuse——"

"Then we will compel you to remain."

Nick laughed aloud, derisively.

"Do you think you could, perhaps, do that?" he asked, coolly.

"Oh, yes; we think so."

"Very good. Then listen: I have just told madame, the queen, that I would return presently. Is it not so, madame?"

"Yes," she replied. "That is true."

"I am going out in order to comply with an expressed wish of hers. Is it not so, madame?"

"That is also true," she said again, "although I did not expressly wish that you would go now."

"It is now—what?—one o'clock!" said Nick, glancing at the timepiece over the bar. "I am going out to be shaved and to change my clothing. At two I will return. Stand aside, sirs, and let me pass!"

The big fellow in front held his ground.

"You cannot go now," he said, calmly.

"Ah! but I am going now."

"You cannot leave this place at present."

"Indeed! Who will prevent me?"

"I!"

"You! Ho! ho!" laughed Nick, derisively. "Come here, my little man, and let me feel of your muscles. If they have grown as big as your feet, perhaps you may detain me."

The man in front of the detective remained unmoved by his sarcasm.

"You cannot go," he repeated, laconically.

Nick Carter was always noted for his lightning-like quickness of action, and now he gave a sudden demonstration of it.

The words were hardly out of the mouth of the big Pole before the detective sprang forward, and so sudden was the attack that the big fellow was totally unprepared for it.

Before he realized that he was attacked, he felt himself seized in a relentless grasp.

The next instant he was raised from his feet into the air, turned and tossed into a horizontal position, and there, seemingly on the tips of Nick's fingers, he was spun around like a boy's top, or like a can which a juggler twirls on the stage for the amusement of an audience.

This lasted but a few seconds of time, and then he was tossed headlong into the air, and directly toward the men who had grouped themselves behind him, so that he fell among them and upon them, like a clod of earth.

And then, while the confusion resulting from the exhibition and its consequences was rampant, Nick darted forward again, thrust two or three of the other men aside, and so passed them and gained the door.

There he turned and faced them, and there he found that they had partly recovered themselves, and were faced in his direction.

He saw also that several of them had drawn weapons from their pockets, but that there appeared not to be a pistol in the crowd; all had drawn knives.

"There, there!" he said, as one might address naughty children. "Put away your little stickers. You have no use for them, I assure you. Stand back, there, you!" to one of them who was advancing. "I have no disposition to hurt you, but you will surely get hurt if you approach any nearer. In an hour I will return."

He had backed toward the door until it was within reach of his hand, and now he turned, and, with a quick motion, opened it and stepped outside, closing it after him.

Then he stopped and waited, but nobody followed him, and he correctly guessed that Madame Turvanieff had taken a hand in the affair, and had advised them all to remain where they were.

After waiting a moment or so, to assure himself that he was not to be followed, he turned away and hurried to the next corner, where he knew the cab would be awaiting him; and there he found it, enveloped in snow, for it was still storming.

A moment later he was driving rapidly toward his own house, for the promise of liberal reward for his services induced the cabby to do his best, and to make his horse, which was a good one, do likewise.

When he arrived at home, he went directly to his study, where he expected to find Conners awaiting him; but Conners was not there.

Patsy, however, was there.

"Well, lad," said Nick, "I see you have got something

on your mind. Tell it to me while I change, for I must go out again, and without delay."

"Conners is up against it," replied Patsy, laconically.

"Eh? Conners? How so?"

Nick was working rapidly while he talked, and Patsy continued:

"When I left you to-night, I came directly here, as you told me to do."

"Of course."

"Well, out on the corner I found these; see?"

Nick turned quickly, to find that Patsy had advanced to the middle of the floor, and that he was holding Conners' hat in one extended hand, and in the other, part of a collar, such as Conners had worn, and the four-in-hand tie, which the detective at once recognized as Conners' property.

"Humph!" said Nick, still busy at the glass. "You found them on the corner, eh?"

"Yes; in the gutter."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Looks as though there had been a scrap, doesn't it?"

"Yes; and as if Conners had got the worst of it."

"He's a lusty chap, Patsy. It takes a good man to get away with Conners."

"There might have been three or four there."

"That's true enough. Did you find any signs?"

"Not a sign."

"Only just those things, eh?"

"Just these."

"He said he was going outside to watch while I was away. Doubtless there was somebody watching him all the while."

"Looks like it," said Patsy.

"Did you make any search?"

"Only just around that corner. I couldn't find a thing, so I thought best to come back here and wait for you."

"I reckon they've got him, lad."

"Who's got him?"

"Oh, I forgot that you had not learned the particulars. It's the Turvanieff woman, Patsy; the one I was up against in Washington. She stayed behind when the other conspirators were sent home, and her special mission is to 'do' me—and incidentally, Conners. Now you're on, eh?"

"You bet!"

"Well, we won't bother with Conners just at present. I reckon he can come rather close to taking care of himself, even if they have got him for the moment; and I think that my present quest is likely to bring me rather close to where they have taken him. But I've got something for you to do, Patsy."

"Good! What is it?"

"I'm ready to go now, and I'm going. I don't suppose I shall have occasion to alter this disguise again until I am through with this case. At least, I won't have to do so to-night."

"It is all right but the fit of the clothes. They're a little baggy," said Patsy.

The detective had removed the whiskers and mustache from his face, and now appeared almost his natural self, for he remembered that Madame Turvanieff had never seen him save at a time when he was disguised as a Japanese, and he was sure that no person who ever went to Blavatski's place had seen him.

The clothing he wore now was simply a suit he had procured for the purpose of representing a rather well dressed farmer, and while the quality and cut were well enough, it was considerably too large for him.

He could not be expected to select a well-fitting suit in the time he had agreed upon to return to Blavatski's.

"What is it you wish me to do?" asked Patsy.

"I want you, as soon as I have gone, to rig yourself out in your gamin clothes, and to do your best to make the disguise a good one. Then go to the corner of Grand and Goerck Streets, and wait there till you hear from me. I shall be in Blavatski's saloon. If I go out accompanied by others, keep us in sight. I may wish to use you at a moment's notice."

"I'll be there," replied Patsy.

"Good!" said Nick. "I know you will. Keep a keen eye and ear to windward, and look out for squalls. So long!"

At a quarter past two o'clock Nick Carter again entered Blavatski's saloon.

## CHAPTER VII.

### PLAYING A BOLD GAME.

The scene in the saloon had altered considerably since Nick Carter left it.

Many of those who had been there when he fought his way out so scientifically had disappeared, for there are no people on earth who are so suspicious as Russians and Poles, and once their suspicions are aroused, it takes a great deal to allay them.

However, there were a dozen or more of the original ones left, and in addition there were several who had not been there when he was there before.

He noticed, too, that these newcomers were evidently closer friends with the madame than those who had gone, and he had no doubt that they were part and parcel with the gang she had referred to in her letter.

But the madame was there! That was all he desired. He cared not a jot for the others, and if they had

but known it, took no interest whatever in their nihilistic affairs.

At first, when he entered the room, nobody recognized him, for it must be remembered that when he left he had worn a straggling beard that was thoroughly Russian; now his face was clean-shaven, and he had also changed his clothes.

Blavatski stepped forward instantly, and was about to oppose his further entrance, when the detective said, laughingly:

"Hello, Blavatski! Don't you know me?"

"Eh? Ah, yes, the voice! Surely it is not—it cannot be Rogenvenski?"

"It surely is Rogenvenski."

Then he turned and made a sweeping bow toward the queen.

"At your service, madame," he said. "I told you I would do it, notwithstanding the hour."

She laughed aloud, well pleased.

"Come here," she said, "and sit beside me. There! Tell me, now, how you did it."

"There is a wide street up here a little way——"

"Yes; the Bowery."

"When I came through it, I noticed an Italian place which had not closed. I had hopes of finding somebody still there, and I was not disappointed. So, you see, I shaved."

"And what an improvement!"

"Thank you."

"And the clothes?"

"Italians are thrifty people, madame. They have methods of procuring almost anything—for a price. There is a maze of streets somewhere in that neighborhood, where it seems there is no difficulty in waking a clothier at any hour—for a price. Behold me!"

"I certainly should not have known you, but for your voice—and, strange as it may seem, I have thought twice to-night that I have heard that voice somewhere before."

"In St. Petersburg, perhaps, more than seven years ago," replied Nick, calmly.

For a moment she seemed dismayed.

"Do you remember ever to have encountered me in St. Petersburg?" she asked, with some evident trepidation.

"Not at all," replied Nick.

"I did not know," she said, relieved, "but we might have met in that long ago of yours, and that you might have recalled me."

"Not at all," he replied again; "although I have that same feeling which you describe, of a former acquaintance. Were your friends angry because I played Beelzebub and disturbed-ek with one of them before leaving?"

"No; they were only amazed. Big Peter, as he is called—the man whom you tossed—is considered a giant among them."

"Bah! He is a baby. I see that many who were here have gone."

"They were afraid. They are all babies who like to arrange murders for others to perform, but who have not themselves the courage to kill a fly."

"That reminds me," said Nick. "What about that particular killing?"

"Will you engage to do it for me, if it becomes necessary?" she asked, archly, lowering her eyes.

"Shall I?" asked Nick, in a low tone, and drawing nearer to her.

She moved nervously in her chair, and for an instant seemed about to draw away from him; but if such was her momentary intention, she controlled it, and Nick permitted himself to smile.

If she had but known what that smile meant!

In point of fact, it meant that he was convinced now that he could defeat her with her own weapons.

She had dared to pretend to make love to him once, in Washington, when he was running down the conspirators who sought to abduct the Japanese prince, and now she dared to make use of the same questionable methods to gain him to her will; and he met her on her own chosen ground.

"Well?" he asked, drawing still closer to her.

"Perhaps it will not be necessary to kill," she faltered, temporizing, for the very evident fierceness of this stranger's advances rather appalled her.

"Then what?" he asked.

"I would rather capture him. I would rather have him for my prisoner."

"But I have no interest in him, or in his capture, or in his death, save that—well, I have already told you wherein my interest lies, and you have said——"

"'Sh-h-h! Do not repeat what I have said."

"But, madame, I have done nothing else but repeat it over and over again to myself, ever since I heard it."

"You should not have done so."

"I could not help doing so. Ah, madame, you will not recall your words?"

"No."

"And you will repeat them?"

"No! no! no! At least, not yet. Wait!"

"Ah! You ask me what is impossible. Wait! Madame, I have been seven years dead. Have you forgotten that?"

"No, no. I have not forgotten."

"And it would seem now that I never lived at all until I looked into your eyes."

"Hush! Hush!"

"Why should I hush? Is there another here who has

the right or thinks he has to object to what I say to you? If so, I will kill him!"

"No, no! There is no other! There is no other! I assure you there is no other."

"Then why——"

"Pray hush! See, you are attracting attention from the others here. They do not know you, and therefore they do not trust you."

"As if I cared for that! Who are these people around us? These newcomers?"

"They are my friends; they will be yours if you will join with us."

"Mine? I want no friends but you. If I will join with you? You know upon what terms I will do that."

She was plainly very nervous by this time, and again she moved uneasily.

"Madame," said Nick, suddenly, "you have not yet told me your name. I must know a name by which I can think of you."

"I am the queen here, among these people."

"I know that. But you have a name."

"Like you, I do not give it out."

"But a name. Your first name. Your given name. Surely there can be no harm in telling me that."

"It is Paula."

"Paula! Paula! Paula! Paula! Ah, it fits you, madame. It is beautiful! Paula!"

"Hush! Hush! For Heaven's sake, hush!"

"I will try. Let us change the subject for the present."

"Pray do so."

"This Madame Turvanieff——"

She started visibly.

"Well, what of her?" she asked, with some petulance.

"Where is she? At your home, where you live? Where is that? I would know—I must know!"

"I cannot tell you that now."

"Not tell me? Bah! Then I will find out for myself. I will cling to you from this moment until you go there, and should these men of yours attempt to prevent me, I will kill them. You know that I can do it. I have the strength of ten men and the courage of a hundred."

"You frighten me—Ivan!" she said, tremblingly, for he was indeed frightened by his vehemence. And she cast down her eyes again and hesitated over the enunciation of the given name, with an art which only an accomplished *intrigante* can master.

Nick knew that it was up to him to make a positive move now, and he leaned toward her until his lips almost touched the hair around her temples.

"I never thought my name beautiful before," he murmured, in her ear, "but from your lips it is exquisite. I do not mean to frighten you, Paula. I would not alarm you for the world. See! I am here beside you. You have asked for my assistance, and you have won it. I will be—ah! anything, if you will it so. And I will be patient, too. But I must know where you live. I must know where to find you. I must know that you trust me—and I will know it!"

"Hush!"

"These men here? What do I care for them, or they for me? That!" and he snapped his fingers. "Prove to me that you trust me. You have come here to this place for some purpose, I know not what, nor——"

"To meet these men who are here, and who are to join with my undertaking."

"To kill the detective?"

"To kill or to capture him—one or the other."

"Well, I can do either, or both, unaided. You do not need them. I can do it all. I will do it all if you will it so—and I will not be impatient. I told you that before. Only you must trust me. Come! You live somewhere near here. You have a supper awaiting you and the men here, there at your home. Take me there with them and you. Let me meet the others of your followers, for they are there, I have no doubt. Let me see this prisoner of yours, this Madame Turvanieff. Then, when I know you trust me, and when you bid me kill, for the sake of a woman who loves me—ah, then, then I will kill! kill! kill!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SPOILING FOR A FIGHT.

"Come, then!" said Madame Turvanieff, rising from her chair with some precipitation. "You have convinced me. I will take you there."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. You have guessed correctly. I had arranged to give my followers a supper at three. Many of them could not appear until that time, and it was necessary that I should meet them here."

"I understand. Some of them you have not met until to-night."

"Precisely. Those who are here now, in fact. The three who entered with me came merely to present me to these others. I would have gone, only that I waited for you to return."

"Ah, madame, I——"

"Hush! No more of that now. I will take you to our supper, but—you must play a part."

"Play a part? I will pull the stars down out of the sky; I will sweep the foam from the waves of the ocean; I will——"

"Pray be still."

"What is the part that I must play?"

"We must appear to be old acquaintances. I will say that you are an old friend—a cousin, if you will. Shall I say that you are a cousin?"

"No, no. Have no relationship in the matter. I could not bear that. Have me merely what I am—your love——"

"My old friend."

"So be it—for the present."

"And you must—ah! am I making a mistake? Let me look into your eyes."

"Look, Paula! Look until the end of your days. Look until time ceases and only eternity obtains."

"What a man you are! What a man you are!" she almost gasped, carried away by his vehemence.

"Ay, a man! A man who was seven years dead, but who now lives, lives, lives!"

"Come," she said, "if you are ready. The others will follow us."

She turned then, and spoke rapidly to the others who were there, and then she called the proprietor, Blavatski, aside, and talked with him in a low tone.

Nick wondered at this, but presently he was reassured, for at the end of that low-toned conversation, Blavatski came toward him with outstretched hands.

"Ah, my dear Rogenvenski," he said, smiling until his fat face was like a burst of sunshine, "the queen has told me that you are an old friend; that you were known to each other when you were children. It is delightful! It is sublime! It is magnificent!"

"Come!" said madame, tartly, and Nick turned to her, and accompanied her from the place.

At short intervals behind them came the four men who were also bidden to the three-o'clock supper.

Once they were upon the street, Madame Turvanieff accepted Nick's arm, and thus they made their way through the storm and the snow together.

"It is too bad there is no carriage," said Nick, remembering that his own was still awaiting him around the corner; but to have made use of it now would have been a fatal mistake.

"It is not far," she responded. "I am living, for purposes with which you will soon be acquainted, very obscurely. The house is nothing; the rooms I have managed to make very comfortable."

"It will be the palace of a queen when you are in it," replied Nick.

At the corner of Grand Street, when they passed it, they encountered a youngster with a bundle of left-over papers on his arm.

"I'm so hungry," he said, plaintively. "I'm stuck, boss. Won't you buy?"

"Yes, I'll take the whole lot," said Nick. "How many are there?"

"Six, boss. Only six."

"Well, here is a quarter, and you may keep the papers," and he winked solemnly at Patsy, for it was he.

"Look here, my lad," he added, as they were about to move on, "do you happen to know where there is a carriage?"

"Yep! There's one standing right around the corner, waiting for somebody, I suppose. I saw it only a minute ago. Shall I git it?"

"No, no," said Madame Turvanieff. "It is not necessary. We have only a short distance to go now." And then she added, in a whisper, to Nick:

"The others would find difficulty in following us if we should take a carriage."

"True. I had forgotten that," said Nick. "I had forgotten all the world but you."

Again he winked at Patsy, and turned his eyes for an instant toward the direction in which the cab was waiting; and Patsy understood.

Then they hastened on.

"Is your friend, Madame Turvanieff, bidden to the supper?" asked Nick.

"She is a prisoner."

"Ay; but she eats, does she not?"

"I suppose so."

"Why not bring her down among us, my queen—Paula? Eh? It would be novel, would it not? And she can hear us laying plans for the death, or capture, whichever you will—of this detective chap; what is his name again?"

"Nick Carter."

"Is Madame Turvanieff a friend of his?"

"They are sweethearts, I suspect, although I do not know it."

"Then would it not be delicious to make our plans where she could hear them? You do not mean that she shall escape, I suppose?"

"I would kill her with these hands before I would permit that. I would kill her to-night, if I thought there was any possibility of such a thing."

"Ah! You are a great woman. You do not hesitate to do yourself what you ask others to do. You are not afraid."

"Afraid? I? Never!"

They walked on in silence after that for some distance, until at last madame came to a halt in front of one of the nondescript houses which abound in that district of the city.

"Here we are," she said; and she looked back along the street in which four shadowy figures could be seen following them.

"They are coming," said Nick.

"Yes; we will await them here, so they will not mistake the house."

"But they can follow our tracks in the snow. In fact, that is precisely what they are doing at this moment."

"True. Then we will enter."

She made use of a key she had carried all the evening in her hand, and presently Nick found himself in the parlor of the house.

He had expected to find some of the comforts which such a woman as Madame Turvanieff required when he entered the house, but he was not prepared for the sumptuous elegance of the place.

She had furnished it like the parlors of a palace. It was evident at a glance that she had not counted the cost of anything there, and had simply given her order to a decorator to be filled.

There were already seven men in the place, and the room was filled with the fragrance of Russian cigarettes. There were four more men coming, and Nick thought, grimly, that there would be eleven in all if it came to a knock-out fight; and he almost wished it might, for he was thoroughly in trim for it.

Moreover, the part he had been compelled to play, of making love to this woman whom he utterly despised, had disgusted him, and he felt that he needed some such exercise to take the taste of the incident out of his mouth.

The seven men rose as they entered the room, and stood respectfully bowing before their queen.

Nick was duly presented to them in the rôle of an old friend, and then the others arrived and were admitted.

In the rear room of the two—that room which is ordinarily called the back parlor—the detective could see that a table had been spread for the guests, and flitting around it were two menservants, also evidently Russians.

"Two more," he mused. "That makes thirteen. Ah, well, the more, the merrier, I suppose."

"Now, my good friends," said madame, when her guests were all assembled, and speaking in Russian, "I think it behooves us to break our fast first, for I am hungry. What say you?"

"That meets entirely with my approval," replied Nick.

"And my friend, Ivan, here," she continued, "has suggested that it will not be amiss if we ask Madame Turvanieff—— By the way, Ivan, she denies her name, and calls herself by an absurd French title, the Countess de Tierney. I will tell you so that you may understand when she enters. He has suggested that we ask her to join us at supper. What say you all?"

"Why? What is the purpose of it?" asked one of the company.

"Merely to give a relish to our meal. Wait! I will go after her. She cannot get away. Have no fear of that."

Madame left the room and ascended the stairs. She was gone perhaps ten minutes, when she returned, followed by slow steps and the clinking of metal.

Nick had purposely turned his back, and he had also withdrawn himself to a far corner of the room, in order that Yvonne should not be surprised into making an exclamation of betrayal when she discovered him.

When, however, he heard the clinking of the metal, he turned, and as he did so his eyes encountered Yvonne's.

Her expression did not change. There was not the quiver of an eyelash to denote that she had ever seen him before, but the warm blood rushed to her cheeks and brow in a wave of ruby red, then fled again, and left her even paler than before.

And what a picture she made, standing there with her wrists fastened together, although more than a foot apart, with a length of gold chain; and Nick realized now why she had walked so slowly, for he understood that her ankles were encumbered in the same way.

"Ivan," said the madame, then, "this is Madame Turvanieff, the spy and traitor, whose life is forfeit to the nihilists. Look well upon her, for she is beautiful. Too beautiful, in fact; but the torture rack will amend all that when she gets to Russia."

"Madame," said Nick, bowing low, "there is only one beautiful woman present."

## CHAPTER IX.

### AN EASY WAY TO COMMIT MURDER.

It never occurred to the real Madame Turvanieff that the man whom she supposed to be Ivan Regenvenski, but who was in reality Nick Carter, did not refer to her when he made the statement that there was only one beautiful woman present; but Yvonne de Tierney understood perfectly whom he meant, and she shot a quick glance at him, while again the blood suffused her cheeks and brow.

And Nick understood now the plot by which madame hoped to get Yvonne out of the country.

She believed that she could accomplish it by the help of the resident nihilists—and she was smart enough to know that it could be done in no other way.

The name Turvanieff was to them like a red flag to a bull.

That name—the name of the woman who bore it, had been sent broadcast throughout the world wherever there was a nihilist. All had been alike warned against her; all had been told that her life was forfeit, and had been instructed to kill, if perchance the opportunity should offer to do so.

Not one of them knew her by sight, so what was easier than for the real Turvanieff woman to appear among them, to announce that she had been sent out by the controlling circle in St. Petersburg to capture her, and that she had been directed to take her back to Russia in order that secrets which she was supposed to possess might be wrung out of her through torture?

It was the real Turvanieff's scheme for returning Yvonne de Tierney to the terrible Third Section of Russia, in order that that great country might wreak its revenge upon a weak and defenseless woman.

It seems almost incredible that in the short time consumed, Nick Carter could have traced Yvonne, and was now actually in her presence; and yet we have seen how it was accomplished.

Had it not been for the thoughtfulness of Yvonne herself, in tracing those four words on the paper with her ring, the detective might still have been in total ignorance concerning her; but those four words—"Prisoner, Turvanieff, Blavatski's, Midnight"—had supplied him with a complete understanding of the condition of things.

As for Yvonne, the golden chains which bound her seemed no longer heavy; she felt no further fear of them.

Nick Carter was in the same room with her, and she felt as if she had suddenly been set free, and told that she could go her way.

It was with difficulty that she restrained herself and preserved the demeanor which had been her studied pose ever since she fell into the power of the Turvanieff woman.

When Nick made the ambiguous remark recorded at the close of the preceding chapter, Madame Turvanieff turned with a triumphant smile to her prisoner.

"Perhaps you will again deny that you are Madame Turvanieff," she said, smiling cruelly.

"I do deny it," replied Yvonne, calmly. "I am Yvonne de Tierney, and it is you who are Madame Turvanieff."

Madame laughed in her low, menacing, yet musical manner.

"It is well acted," she said; "but it cannot deceive me, or my friends here."

She turned then to Nick, and added:

"Our prisoner believes that the same Nick Carter, to whom I have already referred, will come to her rescue, I see."

"Let us hope that he may," replied Nick, with double meaning. "I am here now, and if there is no other man in the world who can handle Nick Carter, he assured that I can do so."

"I believe it," returned the madame, with conviction.

"Let us hope that he will come," repeated Nick. "Let us be on the watch for him to make a sudden entrance, and to attempt to bear her away out of your power. Then will be my opportunity. But how can he hope to find her?"

Madame laughed immoderately at that.

"Through the power of love," she replied, with fine scorn. "This woman loves him; she has as much as confessed that to me already."

Nick purposely refrained from turning his eyes toward Yvonne when that statement was made, but had he done so, he would have seen that the blood rushed to her face again in a redder wave than either time before, and he would have seen her bite her lips with vexation, and then dart an angry glance at the madame, which might have annihilated her then and there, were glances physical things, capable of inflicting injuries.

"And she believes that he loves her," continued the madame, conscious that she was inflicting torture upon her captive, but utterly unconscious of the real explanation of it.

"Women rarely err in affairs of the heart," responded Nick, enigmatically; and then, believing that Yvonne could bear no more without betraying herself in some manner, he turned away, and walked through into the back room, where the table was laid.

His act was the signal for the others to follow, and after a moment they were seated around the table, while the two servants whom Nick had noticed were bustling around like so many bees, serving them.

Nick was given the seat of honor, at madame's right hand; Yvonne was placed at her left.

"Not because I desire to have you so close to me," she said to her, in apologetic explanation, "but because I wish to keep watch and ward over you."

Yvonne disdained to reply at all, and for a few moments the meal progressed in silence.

But with the third course, and its accompanying wines—for be it said that the meal was one which might have done credit to a first-class hotel—their tongues were loosed, and Nick, smiling inwardly, bethought him that the men around him were Russians, and that they would undoubtedly do the way that Russians do when there is no restraint upon them—that is, drink themselves into intoxication.

He knew that outside in the snow, somewhere, Patsy was on guard, waiting; and that the cab would not be far away.

And then, of a sudden, he remembered Conners, and his strange disappearance.

"Madame," he said, turning to his hostess, "is it not time that we heard something of your plans? You have captured this Madame Turvanieff, who sits opposite me, and you have told me of your desire for the death or capture of the detective whom you call Nick Carter. One of them is already in your power, and the other—well,

he is as good as in the same predicament, if you did but realize it."

"You mean that you believe you will have no difficulty in capturing him, or killing him, if once you set your mind and your strength to the task," she replied.

"I mean that I know that I could do either easily, if I made the effort," he said. "But are there others? Are these two all?"

"Indeed there are others."

"And who are they?"

"One—a woman named Zanoni—will arrive in the city some time this morning, for we are now at the breaking of another day."

Nick started. He had no idea that Madame Turvanieff was so well informed.

"What of her?" he asked.

"She must return to Russia also. The torture awaits her, as it does this woman here."

"So? And how do you propose to capture her?"

Madame laughed aloud.

"That will be an easy task, once we have Nick Carter out of the way," she replied.

"You said 'others.' Is there still another?"

"There was; I doubt if there is one still," she replied, significantly.

"I do not understand," said Nick.

"It is easy. If all has gone as I planned, his body is in one of the rivers which flow past the city, by this time."

Nick was startled. Could it be that Conners was already dead—murdered?

"That is some person of whom I have not yet heard," he remarked, tentatively.

"Ah, yes. His name is Conners. He is a secret service agent for the government."

"And what of him?"

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Nothing," she said. "He incurred my displeasure, that is all. I ordered that he be put out of the way of committing further mischief."

"And has it been done already?"

She laughed aloud this time.

"I suppose so. I know that he was captured. I know that he was taken into a hack, chloroformed and bound, and I know that the hack started for one of the rivers. There was a twenty-pound weight in the carriage with him."

"Ah! To sink him to the bottom of the river, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes. I dislike the letting of blood, unless it is necessary."

"Then how was it to be done?"

"Why, I have already told you. Chloroformed into unconsciousness; a rope, to which the weight was attached, tied to his wrists; a splash in the water, and he hangs there, head downward; that is all; is it not enough?"

"You are an artist, madame!"

She smiled at him, well pleased.

"Who did this for you, madame?" asked Nick.

"The three gentlemen on your right, Ivan. They did it. They are invaluable."

Nick turned to them to meet their bows and smiles. It was evident that they were as proud of their achievement as is a schoolboy over a prize composition.

"When did you accomplish it all?" he asked of them; and one of the men—the one who was nearest to Nick, replied:

"Between one and two o'clock. We captured the man on a corner near the house of the detective."

"But how? How did you capture him?"

"Two of us walked past him quickly while he stood on the corner. I tapped him on the back of the head with this," and he exhibited a short, loaded billy. "The rest was easy."

"Poor Conners!" thought Nick. "If he has not managed to escape himself, it is too late for me to do anything for him."

Then he turned to the madame again.

"There are only two left, then, for you to secure; the woman, Zanoni, and the detective."

"Only two," she replied. "Already I have taken measures to capture Zanoni, when she leaves the cars on her arrival in the city; but even if she should avoid me then, she will be easy prey, when——"

"When you have done for Nick Carter," he finished, for her.

## CHAPTER X.

### NICK CARTER HAS USE FOR TERRIBLE WEAPONS.

"Now to our plans," said madame.

"Ay; to the plans," assented Nick.

"Upon you, Ivan, shall devolve the weight of this expedition against the detective. I tell you now that I care very little whether he is killed or falls into my hands alive. Of the two, I should prefer the latter, for I have enough Tartar blood in my veins to love torture when it is inflicted upon an enemy."

"Yes," said Nick. "I do not doubt it."

"It is my purpose to wreck his house so that it will never be habitable again. If there are people there who will fall victims to the explosion when it occurs, it is their own fault. They should be elsewhere, instead of serving Nick Carter."

"Well said! Well said!"

"Sacha, Orloff and Peter already have the two bombs prepared. Where are they, Sacha?"

"In my room. They are ready. They are very powerful."

"Sufficiently so to wreck the house?"

"One stone will not be left upon another when they are exploded."

"Good! And the time? You have not forgotten that?"

"At midnight, this very night."

"And how will you set them off?"

"They are to be placed side by side underneath the front steps. Then a slow match, which will occupy five or six minutes in burning, will explode half a pound of powder contained in the bottle beside them. The concussion of the powder will explode the bombs, and—*Helah!* The thing is done. Poof! The house goes into the air, with everything it contains!"

"Excellent! Most excellent! You see, Ivan, how well I have planned?"

"Indeed I do. It is fortunate that I am here to take lessons of you."

"But your work must be done first."

"Tell me what it is to be, and it shall be done, my queen."

"At ten you will go to the house of the detective. You do not much resemble a Russian since you have shaved off your beard."

"I will look like anything you ask me to," he replied, with a bow across the table.

"At ten, then, you will go to his house. You will represent yourself as a prospective client. You will have an imaginary case to place in his hands. I have no doubt you can invent a good story for the occasion."

"I think I am equal to the task."

"You will see him alone. With your great strength, of which I have already had sufficient evidence, you will attack him. Strike him when he is least expecting it. If you kill him, it does not matter; but strike him so that he will be senseless. Bind him then, if he is not dead."

"And if he is dead——"

"Cut his throat to make sure, and leave him there for the explosion to tear him into a thousand pieces."

"And if he is not dead——"

"Bring him away, if possible, in the carriage which you will have at the door, and in which I will be waiting. But run no risks. Kill him rather than do that."

Nick permitted his eyes to wander for an instant to Yvonne, and he found that she was gazing upon him intently; and then, as madame also caught that glance, she spoke for the first time.

"It is hideous!" she said. "Are you a man to contemplate such a crime?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders, and the madame laughed aloud.

"Hear her!" she said; and then, still keeping up the face of addressing Yvonne by her (madame's) own name, she added:

"Come! We want no more of your presence here. I will conduct you to your room."

Yvonne rose obediently, and Madame Turvanieff seized her by the arm and led her across the floor, through the saloon parlor, and through the door into the hall, which she closed behind her.

As soon as she had closed the door, Nick also rose from the table.

He uttered no word to the others who were assembled there, but strode rapidly across the room to the door through which the two women had passed, opened it, and went out.

He was conscious that his companions at the table were watching him closely, and he knew that they neither understood nor approved of his act; but he decided that the boldest method was the best, under the circumstances, and he took it.

He had permitted the women sufficient time to have gained the second floor before he made the move, and when he issued into the hall he could hear the swishing of their garments over his head, and this sound was immediately followed by the sound of a closing door.

He knew that they had entered a room on the second floor, and without an instant of hesitation he ran up the stairs.

But there, on the second landing, he paused and waited.

He was by no means sure that one or more of the men in the parlor would not follow him, and he had no wish to be taken off his guard in that place.

He understood thoroughly that he would have short shift for his life, did they once suspect that he was not all that he represented himself to be.

Murder was the trade of these people.

They looked upon that sort of crime with as little compunction as a butcher feels when it becomes his duty to prepare a hog for the market.

And there were thirteen men and a woman against him in that house.

Ordinarily a woman, in such a contingency, would not be considered, but Nick Carter was rather of the opinion that Madame Turvanieff was the most dangerous of all who were there.

He knew by experience that she would not hesitate to fight, and to make deadly use of the weapons which she carried concealed about her person; and he also knew by experience how accurately she could use them.

But although he waited at the top of the stairs

several moments, nobody appeared in the lower hall in pursuit of him.

He feared, too, that with every moment Madame Turvanieff would come out of the room into which she had conducted Yvonne, and find him there, and such a *contretemps* formed no part of his desires.

What he did wish to do was to have one half a minute alone with Yvonne—a sufficient length of time for him to make use of the powerful little nippers he always carried in one of his pockets, and thus sever the golden chains which bound her.

Convinced that he had not been pursued when he left the parlors, he passed along the hall, and stepped into a small room at the end of it; and he had barely ensconced himself out of sight when the door opened, and Madame Turvanieff came out.

She closed and locked the door behind her, and removed the key.

Then she glanced up and down the hall for a moment, after which she turned away and went slowly down the stairs.

Now, it would seem that the detective was risking a great deal in permitting himself to be found absent from the parlor by the madame when she should return to it; but he had already decided that the time had come to act, and he had also made up his mind just what form that action on his part should take.

The instant when madame started down the stairs, Nick passed silently but rapidly up the second flight, which led to the third floor.

He had noted with considerable interest what the man at the table had said about the bombs with which he was to blow up Nick Carter's house, and he had resolved then and there that he might himself make very good use of those terrible weapons.

Where—that is, in what part of the house—Sacha's room was located, he had no idea; but that it was in the house, he did not for a moment doubt.

Being in the house, it was more than likely that it would be found on the third floor, and that is why he hurried up the stairs as madame passed down the first flight.

His little electric searchlight was in his grasp, and as he reached the landing of the third floor, he pressed the button.

In front of him was an open door, and he passed through it, throwing the light around the room as he did so.

Near the head of the bed was a small trunk, closed and locked, as he soon discovered; but it was the work of a few seconds only for him to pass one of his little steel tools under the clasp, and so force it open.

He raised the lid, and he discovered at a glance that he had been fortunate in the selection of the room.

There was scarcely more than the two bombs themselves inside the trunk, save that they were lying snugly imbedded in a wad of cotton.

They were not large, either of them, each being about the size of an ordinary apple; and without hesitation he took them in his hands and dropped them into the side pockets of his coat.

"I'll have to walk on eggs for a while now," he murmured, to himself. "It wouldn't do for me to let anything jar me at this stage of the game."

He turned and passed out of the room and down the stairs again. Then he rapidly entered the bath room, lighted the gas, and closed the door just at the instant when he heard the parlor door at the foot of the stairs open once again.

He knew that madame, or one of the men, had come out of the room to ascertain what had become of him, and after a moment he was positive that it was the woman, for he could hear her light footfall on the stairs as she ascended.

He coughed loudly, and at the same time turned on the water in the washbowl, as if he had no idea of concealing his locality; and he stamped and blew his nose to make himself all the more manifest, and to give the impression that he was engaged in washing his hands, and that in rather a noisy manner.

The noise made by the running water prevented him from hearing whether madame turned back again or not, and so returned to the parlor; and after waiting several moments, he turned off the water, opened the door, and passed out again into the hall.

There was no person in sight.

He hesitated only a moment, and then, with quick steps, he reached the door of Yvonne's room, unfastened it with his pick-lock, opened it, and stepped inside.

The light was still burning, and Yvonne was standing, with clasped hands, in the middle of the floor.

## CHAPTER XI.

### "WE WILL ALL BE DEAD TOGETHER."

The detective put his finger to his lips to indicate that she was not to speak.

Then he stepped quickly forward.

The nippers were already in his grasp. He had exchanged them for the pick-lock the instant he passed the doorway.

To close their sharp jaws over the golden chain close to her wrists—first one and then the other—was the work of an instant only, and her hands were free, al-

though the circles of gold still clung about her wrists like bracelets.

Next, her ankles.

The chain there had been affixed in the same manner, and Yvonne had but to raise her skirts to the tops of her boots while Nick knelt upon the floor and cut the golden links.

He rose to his feet hastily then, and, having pressed one of his extra revolvers into her hand, he uttered the one word, "Wait!" and hastily left the room, closing the door behind him, but leaving it unlocked.

The hall was still deserted, and he stepped into the bath room again, and turned off the light.

The intense quiet below was ominous, he thought, as he descended the stairs; and when he reached the door which opened into the parlor, he hesitated.

"I wonder if I fooled her?" he mused. "Madame Turvanieff is not a woman who is readily deceived, notwithstanding what I have accomplished to-night. I did that through very boldness and recklessness, but now I've got a notion that they suspect what I am up to."

After a moment he reached out, turned the knob of the door, threw it open, and at the same moment stepped backward out of the way, in case there should be anybody awaiting him there.

But nothing appeared.

The way before him seemed to be open and clear, and he passed through into the parlor.

The party he had left was still seated around the table in the back parlor.

Madame was there in her accustomed place at the head of the table, and she raised her eyes and smiled at him when he entered.

There was only one guest missing from the room, and Nick noticed with some concern that it was the man, Sacha, who had disappeared—Sacha, into whose trunk he had broken, and from whom he had stolen the bombs.

"If he has gone to his room," thought Nick, "it won't be long before there will be something doing here, for he can discover his loss with half an eye, if he happens to test it upon that steamer trunk."

"I thought you had gone to see our prisoner," said madame, with a smile.

"I did," replied Nick, boldly.

"Indeed!" said madame, still smiling. "And did you succeed?"

"No; the door was locked."

"Do you mean that you actually tried the door?"

"Certainly. I thought you were still there."

"Ah! Then it was I for whom you were searching?"

"May I not ask a question?"

Madame shrugged her shoulders and laughed aloud.

"She will not retire; she refuses to accept the comforts I offer her; she resents the two chains of gold which I have used in decorating her, notwithstanding the fact that I might have used steel ones just as well, if I were not so fastidious."

"Where is Sacha?" asked Nick, abruptly.

"Gone to his room," replied madame, placidly. "I expressed a wish to see the bombs he has made, for the blowing up of Nick Carter's house. He has gone to fetch them."

Nick left the table and strolled over to the mantel, turning and leaning against it in such a manner that he had the entire room in front of him.

"Have you finished?" asked madame. "You have eaten nothing, and drank less."

"Blavatski's beer did not agree with me," replied Nick.

Madame rose and came toward him with a glass of wine in her hand.

"Take this," she said. "It will do you good."

"No, thank you. Not now. Not at present. Later, perhaps."

"Can it be possible that my strong man is ill?"

"No, indeed! Not ill. Merely indifferent. I am not accustomed to such high living. You must remember that I was seven years dead, and that I ate nothing which could be called food during that time."

All the while, as he was speaking, he was listening intently for the return of Sacha.

Madame Turvanieff still stood before him, only a few feet distant, and she was watching him all the while with that strange smile on her beautiful features, and with that catlike purring in her manner.

"Won't you return to the table?" she asked him now.

"In a moment, madame. Pray excuse me for a moment."

"You are really ill?"

"No; I am really——"

He paused abruptly, for at that instant the parlor door opened, and Sacha entered.

It was plain to everybody, the instant he entered the room, that he was laboring under great excitement; and he came forward rapidly, heading straight toward Nick.

But he had not passed the threshold of the door between the two rooms, before he came to a halt, glaring at Nick Carter in wild-eyed terror. Even Madame Turvanieff uttered a half shriek and started away from Nick, pausing only when her back was against the chair in which she had been seated at the table.

And well they might.

Nick Carter had quietly taken the two murderous bombs from his pockets, and stood, still leaning idly against the mantel, holding them in his hands in such a manner that if he released them they would fall upon the stone hearth at his feet.

"You have them! You have them! It was you who desecrated my trunk and robbed me!" cried Sacha, in great excitement.

"For God's sake, don't drop them!" cried madame, in the same breath.

And the remaining guests seemed to shrink into themselves until they became perceptibly smaller.

Not a person in all that roomful seemed to dare to move, lest the bombs should be exploded.

Sacha drew a revolver from one of his pockets and pointed it at Nick; but the detective only laughed at him.

"Shoot," he said, "if you care to do so. Then it will be you who explode the bombs; not I, Sacha."

"You have robbed me!" shouted Sacha, nevertheless returning the pistol to his pocket.

"Yes, I robbed you," replied Nick, calmly.

"Why? Why?" gasped madame.

"Because I wished to see the bombs which are to blow up the detective."

"But why? Why?"

"I felt an interest in them. I wished to see how big they were."

"Well," exclaimed Sacha, huskily, for his terror was still great, "now that you have seen them, and know how big they are, return them to me, and I will take them back again, and place them in the trunk."

"Not yet," replied Nick, still with exasperating calmness.

"Why did you take them from the trunk at all?" asked madame, who had now recovered her accustomed demeanor, although she was very white and very wide-eyed still.

"Why?" replied Nick. "Let us call it curiosity. You see, madame, I once nearly fell a victim to one of these things, and I had curiosity to see how they were made and what they looked like. I also had doubts about Sacha's ability to use them. I think I can do it much better."

"Better! Better!" shouted Sacha. "How could you do it better than I? I made them myself. I know what they contain. I have used them—or others like them—before. Ach! indeed, they are terrible."

"And powerful?" asked Nick, exactly as if he were interested in the possibilites of the bombs.

"Powerful? Ach! There are none so powerful as they are. They are small—yes, they are small, but if you should drop one of them now, this house and the houses on either side of us would be torn to atoms, and there would not be a vestige of the bodies of ourselves left—not even after it had happened."

"So?" said Nick. And he raised one of them until he held it in front of his own smiling face in his fingers, in the meantime, in a manner which brought ejaculations of terror from every person in the room.

"For God's sake, have a care!" gasped Madame Turvanieff.

"Be assured, madame, that I will not drop it," replied Nick.

"No, no, I know you will not drop it purposely; but an accident might happen. It might slip out of your fingers. Ah! Ivan, I pray you, return it to Sacha."

"Not yet," said Nick; and then he laughed aloud, mirthfully, almost wildly.

"Is it not pleasant to contemplate the fact that death—quick, painless death, is so near at hand? See! I have only to toss this in the air—so!"—and he made a motion as if he were actually giving them a demonstration, securing therefrom a shriek from madame, and low-toned curses from the men—"to send us all out of our troubles together."

"Are you mad, Ivan?" whispered the madame, for her terror was now so great that she could no longer speak in her natural tones.

"Mad? Yes—and no. I have been dead seven years. I have told you that before, I think; but all that time I have never been really dead. It was only a pretense; and now I wonder how it would feel if the real thing should come to us all, here together; eh?"

Madame Turvanieff wrung her hands together in despair.

"Ivan! Ivan!" she murmured, so low that her words were scarcely audible. "Do you remember all that was said between us, there at Blavatski's?"

"Do I remember? Ay; I remember. Do you?"

"Indeed I remember. It shall be as you say, Ivan, if you will but return the bombs to Sacha. You are great! You are strong! You are wonderful! It shall be as you say. Do you hear me? It shall be as you say."

"No," said Nick, holding them aloft again. "I think it will be better to drop them; for then—why, then, instead of being dead for seven years, we will all be dead together—and forever!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FURY OF A MADDENED WOMAN.

With a low moan, Madame Turvanieff sank quietly back upon a chair beside her, and fainted dead away. One of the party uttered a gasp, and slid under the table. He had also fainted.

The others were paralyzed with terror, so that none of them could move.

Sacha stood where he had halted upon his entrance to the room. His knees were shaking under him and he was in momentary danger of falling.

One and all who remained conscious were staring at the detective in wide-eyed terror.

Nick saw that they believed him suddenly gone mad, and he determined to make the most of the idea.

"Shall I drop it?" he asked of Sacha.

"No! For God's sake, no!"

"Why not? The death is painless, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, but we do not wish to die."

"No? That is strange. I was dead seven years, as you know."

"It is a pity you did not stay dead seven more," growled one of the men at the table.

"What's that?" demanded Nick, turning toward him and frowning. "Repeat that and I will hurl this bomb at your head," and he raised it threateningly.

"I did not mean it. Forgive me! I did not mean it," gasped the man, in terror.

"It is well that you did not," rejoined Nick. "And you made these, Sacha, with your own hands?"

"Yes; I made them."

"And they will kill, kill, kill, eh? Is that it?"

"They will annihilate, dismember, destroy. They are terrible—awful!"

"They are beautiful," said Nick.

"Ay! they are beautiful, too. I thought so when I made them," murmured Sacha, with professional pride.

"And you were going to use them to blow up the house of Nick Carter, eh?"

"Yes, yes, that is what they were for."

"Did you make them for that purpose?"

"Yes, yes; for that alone. For nothing else."

"Why do you wish to blow him to pieces? What has he done to you?"

"Nothing. It was the order of the queen."

"Ah! The queen. Madame, you mean?"

"Yes, madame."

"And that woman upstairs—did you mean to blow her to pieces, also?"

"No, no; she was to go to Russia with the queen."

"Do you know who that woman is? The one upstairs, I mean?"

"She is Madame Turvanieff. A spy. A traitor."

"Not so, Sacha. You are wrong."

"Wrong? How can I be wrong?"

"Because yonder is Madame Turvanieff, lying on the floor in a faint. The woman upstairs is not Madame Turvanieff; the woman here is. She has fooled you, Sacha. That is why I stole your bombs—so I could tell you about it."

"Then you are not mad?"

"Mad? I was never more sane in my life, Sacha. Yonder is Madame Turvanieff, on the floor. Go to her, for she is recovering. Help her to a chair, and ask her if I am not right."

Sacha obeyed. Indeed, he dared do nothing else than obey the man who stood at the mantel with those terrible bombs in his hands.

The madame was recovering.

She opened her eyes and gasped several times for breath. Then, with the assistance of Sacha, she sat upright on the floor.

For a moment the recollection of what had occurred seemed to have flown from her, but when her eyes traveled to Nick, and she saw him still standing there with the deadly bombs in his hands, she remembered.

"Ask her," said Nick to Sacha.

"Madame," said Sacha, trembling like an aspen under the double strain, "Ivan says that the woman upstairs is not Madame Turvanieff; he says that you are Madame Turvanieff."

The statement was all that was needed to bring the madame thoroughly to her senses.

"He says what?" she demanded.

"He says that you are Madame Turvanieff."

"Tell the truth, madame, for once in your life," said Nick, sternly. "Confess that you are Madame Turvanieff yourself—the woman who has been denounced as a traitor. Tell the truth! Tell the truth!"

"It is not the truth. It is a lie! A lie!"

"Tell him," continued Nick, "how you came to America at the command of the czar, and not because you were sent here by any circle of nihilists. Tell them that."

"It is a lie! A lie!" she repeated.

"Tell them," continued the detective again, "how you and Marakoff and others believed you had decoyed the Japanese prince into your power at a gambling house in Washington, and how you intended to abduct him—by command of the czar. Tell them that."

"It is a lie! A lie!" she moaned.

"Tell them how a gentleman, whom you supposed to be a member of the prince's suit, visited you at Marakoff's gambling house, and gambled with all the Russians there, beating them all, and winning the hateful Russian money, which he would not accept after he had won it."

"A lie! A lie! A lie!"

"Tell them how that same supposed Jap struck your despicable husband, whose name is Turvanieff, and knocked him into insensibility; and tell them how, later, when Turvanieff attacked him, that same supposed Jap raised the big man in his arms and threw him bodily against the wall, so that he fell away from it, a cripple for life. Tell them that."

Madame Turvanieff was crouching low in her chair now, and her eyes were blazing into Nick's.

"And you! You!" she gasped, huskily. "Who are you?"

"Tell them," continued Nick, without heeding her excitement or her question, "how the supposed prince and the Jap, who injured your husband, were taken in a carriage from the gambling house, by Marakoff and another, and how, on their way to the wharf where your yacht—the property of the Russian Government, by whom you were and are employed—was lying, they overpowered Marakoff and his companion. Tell them that."

She cowered still lower in her chair, and her eyes blazed at Nick Carter still more savagely; but this time she uttered no word of reply.

"Tell them how the men on the yacht were captured. Tell them how one of the women there—one of your friends and companions, employed as spies for the Russian Government—threw a bomb, like this one, at the head of the supposed Jap, and how he caught the bomb, carried it on deck and threw it overboard. Tell them that."

"You, you, you!" muttered the woman, her eyes glowing like the eyes of a tigeress.

"Tell them how you were ordered out of the country by the secretary of state, and how you sent your maid home to Russia in your place, and how you remained behind, in order that you might have an opportunity to wreak vengeance upon the man who had made it impossible for you to secure promotion for yourself and your husband from the czar. Tell them that."

The woman's face relaxed into a smile; but it was a deadly ominous one. And her eyes—they were terrible. They glowed with the fire of unquenchable fury; they were like the eyes of a tigress, maddened beyond endurance."

"Tell them," continued Nick, relentlessly, "of the letter you wrote to Marakoff, and how you told him if he were but patient, you would find a way to free him. These men know who Marakoff is. They know that he is a spy of Russia's Government. Tell them that you are Marakoff's friends. Tell them that!"

She straightened up in her chair and glared at the detective.

"I know you now, you devil! You fiend!" she breathed, gaspingly. "You are Nick Carter! You are Nick Carter!"

"Yes," replied Nick, "I am Nick Carter; and you, Madame Turvanieff, have played your last card in this game."

Then she acted.

With sudden fury she tore a dagger from her bosom, and leaped, like a tigress, full at Nick Carter, where he stood at the mantel, with the two terrible bombs in his hands.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE ODDS ON THE OTHER SIDE.

Madame Turvanieff, in her rage, had either forgotten the bombs, or she did not care for them; perhaps she even wished that they might be exploded, and so tear them all to pieces.

But it was not fated that any member of that party was to fall a victim to those bombs.

So intent had they all become upon the scene which was being enacted before them, in the denunciation of Madame Turvanieff, which everyone was forced to believe was true, that not one in the party heard or saw the door of the parlor open, and Yvonne de Tierney glide into the room.

For a moment she stood there in the middle of the parlor, watching and listening. In fact, she had been just outside of the door for a long time, and she understood the situation thoroughly.

And there was one thing which she understood even better than Nick Carter himself, and that was the ungovernable fury of a woman when she is maddened beyond control.

At first she opened the door a little, and very silently, and peered into the room.

From her position she could see Nick standing near the mantel with the two bombs in his hands; and, being in part, at least, Russian, and having had much to do with Russian affairs, she knew and realized thoroughly the terrible danger that reposed in them.

When she stepped into the room and gained a position from which she could get a view of the features of Madame Turvanieff, she realized that the woman would attack Nick before he completed his denouncement, bombs or no bombs; and she knew that such an attack meant that the missiles would be dropped to the floor, and that the detective, as well as every person in the house, would be blown to atoms.

True, she thought only of Nick at that moment; not of herself or of the others who were there.

Realizing all this, she knew that the only hope of saving him—and all the others, as well—existed in the bare possibility that she could possess herself of those terrible implements of death before Madame Turvanieff should make her attack.

It was a critical moment for all of them—extremely critical for Yvonne de Tierney; but she did not hesitate.

Like a shadow she crept forward, and so intense was the preoccupation of the others who were there, that they neither saw nor heard her.

Sacha stood with his back toward her, and, like the others, he had, for the moment, forgotten the bombs, and kept his eyes fixed upon Madame Turvanieff while she writhed under the lash of Nick Carter's denouncement.

And so Yvonne glided past him unseen—and unseen by his companions as well.

Thus she crept nearer and nearer to the detective, where he was standing by the mantel, until she was almost at his side, but just enough back of him so that he did not see her.

And all the time Yvonne watched the eyes of the woman in the chair—those eyes which were flaming into Nick's with such ungovernable fury.

Yvonne saw the pupils dilate more and more, and then narrow themselves into little slits.

She saw the glint of red in them, as you may have seen it appear in the eyes of a maddened bull.

She saw the twitching of the woman's fingers; the swelling of the glands in her throat, the hardening into corrugation of the lines of her forehead; the contraction of her lips, which brought her teeth into view, in the manner of a dog, snarling with rage.

She saw all this, and she understood what it meant.

She only prayed that she could reach Nick Carter's side in time.

Yvonne knew the instant when the woman was ready to spring, and she was just that one instant too quick for Madame Turvanieff.

She was at Nick Carter's side already, and as Madame Turvanieff reached for the dagger in her bosom, Yvonne spoke.

What she said was in a low, quiet tone, for she did not wish to startle Nick, or to distract his attention; but the words were uttered so rapidly that they were out even as the woman with the dagger tore it from her bosom and leaped to her feet.

"Nick!" she said. "The bombs! Give them to me!"

And as she uttered the words, her two hands were thrust forward, and they seized upon the deadly missiles in Nick Carter's grasp.

Instantly he relinquished his hold upon them, for he knew the quiet voice that had spoken in his ear, and he had perfect confidence in its owner.

Incidents may follow one another with lightning-like rapidity, and yet each have its own separate interval, however infinitesimal it may be.

This was one of those occasions when fractions of time were computed into the millionth parts of seconds. Time, without measure or the possibility of measurement—and yet, time—an interval.

The leap of a tigress could not have been more sudden than the onslaught of Madame Turvanieff when she flew at the detective, and yet, between the contraction of her muscles in preparation for the leap, and the actual act, there was time for what Yvonne de Tierney had to do.

She seized the bombs. The detective released them to her even as he saw the dagger of Madame Turvanieff descending upon him.

There was no time for him to seize her wrists.

He could do nothing but guard, and he threw up his arm as a parry that might ward off a blow, and so receive the impact of the blade which held the dagger across his forearm.

Even then he did not entirely stop it.

He felt the point of the weapon touch him and enter his flesh upon his shoulder; but he knew that he had knocked the arm which held the weapon back again, before it had pierced too deeply.

But now she was full upon him. She was tearing at him with her teeth and nails, and striving, with all her might, to tear loose the hand which he had now seized, and which contained the weapon.

But Nick bent that wrist backward until the fingers relaxed, and the dagger dropped to the floor. Then he flung the woman from him into the chair, and turned—just in time to see Sacha reach over the shoulders of Yvonne and tear the two deadly bombs out of her grasp; just in time to know that now the tables were turned upon him, and that the odds were on the other side.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE REAL HERO OF THE FIGHT.

With the possession of the bombs transferred to Sacha—and every eye in the room witnessed the act, save those of Madame Turvanieff, who seemed to have shrunk into herself after that one burst of furious rage and who was now dazed and half unconscious—the men around the table who had, until now, remained paralyzed with terror, leaped to their feet and started forward.

They believed, readily enough, that the woman who had attacked Nick Carter was the real Madame Turvanieff, but they were none the less certain that the detective was their enemy.

Yvonne, realizing that she had lost whatever advantage she had gained, shrank back into a corner and drew the pistol which Nick Carter had placed in her hands in the room on the second floor.

Things happen quickly in such crises.

There was no time for consideration or for planning.

Almost at the very instant when Nick saw Sacha seize the bombs from the hands of Yvonne, the men who had gathered around the table, flung themselves upon him.

Nick Carter, the terrible Nick Carter, whom they dreaded and feared, was practically in their power; he was there before them; they believed that all they had to do was to fall upon him and capture him.

They believed, also, that if they permitted him to escape, they would suffer dire consequences, and—well, they had but one thought, one idea, and that was to capture him, or to kill him, and it was a matter of small moment which.

So sudden was the attack, so quick was their forward movement the instant when they realized that Sacha had repossessed himself of the bombs, that Nick had not even the opportunity to throw into his hands either of the little weapons he carried in his sleeves—those weapons which were attached to his arms by spiral springs, and which he could make use of so quickly and so dexterously.

It was Orloff and Peter, the compatriots of Sacha, who were in advance of the others in that attack, and it was Orloff who reached Nick Carter first.

It was his misfortune, also, for Nick's fist caught him squarely on the point of the jaw and fractured it, and, at the same time, the fellow was driven backward like a battering-ram, and so suddenly that the back of his head struck Peter in the face and effectually put him out of business, also.

And now the detective's blood was up.

There were so many concerned in the attack upon him that it gave him an advantage.

They got in one another's way. One impeded the actions of another. They fought without system and without sense, for they were still under the influence of the terror they had so lately experienced.

On the other hand, Nick was cool, determined, fearless and relentless.

More, he was fighting for Yvonne rather than for himself—Yvonne, who stood bravely and silently in her corner, waiting—waiting, and never once doubting the outcome of that unequal struggle.

The revolver was still in her hand, and raised, ready for instant use; but she could make no use of it then—at least, she did not dare do so lest her bullet should injure Nick, who was the very center of that struggling mass.

The first blow which Nick struck was followed quickly and rapidly by others. This was the moment in Nick Carter's life when the punching-bag exercises, with which he got up his circulation every morning when at home, came in handy.

The heads and the bodies of his opponents were as so many different positions of the punching bag, and he struck them with the same unerring rapidity that he used in his exercises.

The men in front of him went down beneath his blows like so many tenpins, one after another, and many of them to remain where they fell, insensible.

But all his blows could not be so terrific. Some of them were necessarily given with a short-arm effect, and the man hit would leap to his feet again to renew the attack.

Removed from the combatants, and standing in the doorway between the rooms, was Sacha, with the two deadly bombs still in his hands.

But Nick had no fear of those, for he knew that Sacha would not dare to make use of them, knowing, as he did, that the explosion of one of them would mean death to them all—and to himself as well.

More, Nick realized that Sacha did not dare even to lay them aside in order to join in the fight, lest they should again fall into the hands of his enemies, or that some accident might explode them; and so he stood there, like Yvonne, a mere spectator.

Yvonne perceived this at almost the same instant, and she crept away from her corner, toward Sacha, until she was within a few feet of him. Then she raised her pistol and pointed the muzzle directly at one of the bombs.

"Back!" she cried, in Russian. "Walk backward to the front door, or as sure as you are a living man I will fire and explode the bomb!"

He saw the determination in her face and eyes, and he obeyed.

And so she drove him backward, step by step, through the front parlor and into the hall, compelling him to keep his face toward her, and to turn as she bade him do, until she commanded him to halt with his back against the post of the balustrade, and with her almost against the front door of the house.

With her disengaged hand she reached behind her and turned the knob; and then she backed still further through the shallow vestibule until she was enabled to open the outside door also.

Even as she was fumbling for the knob behind her, there came a pounding on the door, and, as she opened it, Patsy, followed by three men, two of whom were policemen, dashed past her into the house.

The third man who followed Patsy was Conners. His clothing was like a sheet of ice, and his whole appearance was as if he had been immersed in the center of an iceberg since the glacial period—but he was Conners, none the less, and with all Conners' sterling bravery and daring.

He took in the situation at a glance.

With one bound he was at Sacha's side.

"Give me those things!" he demanded; and he reached up and took them from him, while Sacha, with a shriek of terror at what he believed to be a ghost, fled up the stairs.

Then, with the bombs in his hands, Conners led the way into the parlor.

But he halted in the very center of the floor, and smiled.

There were nine insensible men stretched upon the floor in the back parlor, amid the débris of the wrecked supper table, and there were three others, apparently unhurt, crouching at the side of the room, while Nick Carter stood again by the mantel with a revolver in either hand, leveled at them. He had won the fight single handed—won it before the assistance arrived.

Madame Turvanieff had slipped from her chair to the floor, and when they attempted to lift her, they found that she was quite dead; and there were flecks of foam upon her lips which showed how she had died—by poison, self-administered.

"You see," said Conners, later, when he explained, "when those fellows tapped me on the head, I recovered consciousness almost as soon as they got me in the carriage; but they had bound me, and I could do nothing. However, I heard them talking, and I heard this address; also that they intended to meet here to plan for the wrecking of your house, Nick, so when they chucked me into the river with the weight tied to my wrists, and the weight tore the cords loose from my wrists, and some of the flesh with it, I came directly here, as soon as I got out. I ran all the way, so I wasn't cold. Outside the door I found Patsy and the two cops. Pat had heard the noise of the fight, and had just got the cops. I reckon you know the rest."

Nick turned, with a smile, to Yvonne.

"Gentlemen," he said, "here is the real hero of the occasion. But for Madame de Tierney, and her bravery and thoughtfulness, we should all have been blown to atoms when the Turvanieff woman sprang at me."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 425, will contain "Daring Dan, the Human Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Smartest Foe."

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